

2013 HIGH SCHOOL ALL-AMERICANS

# SLAM



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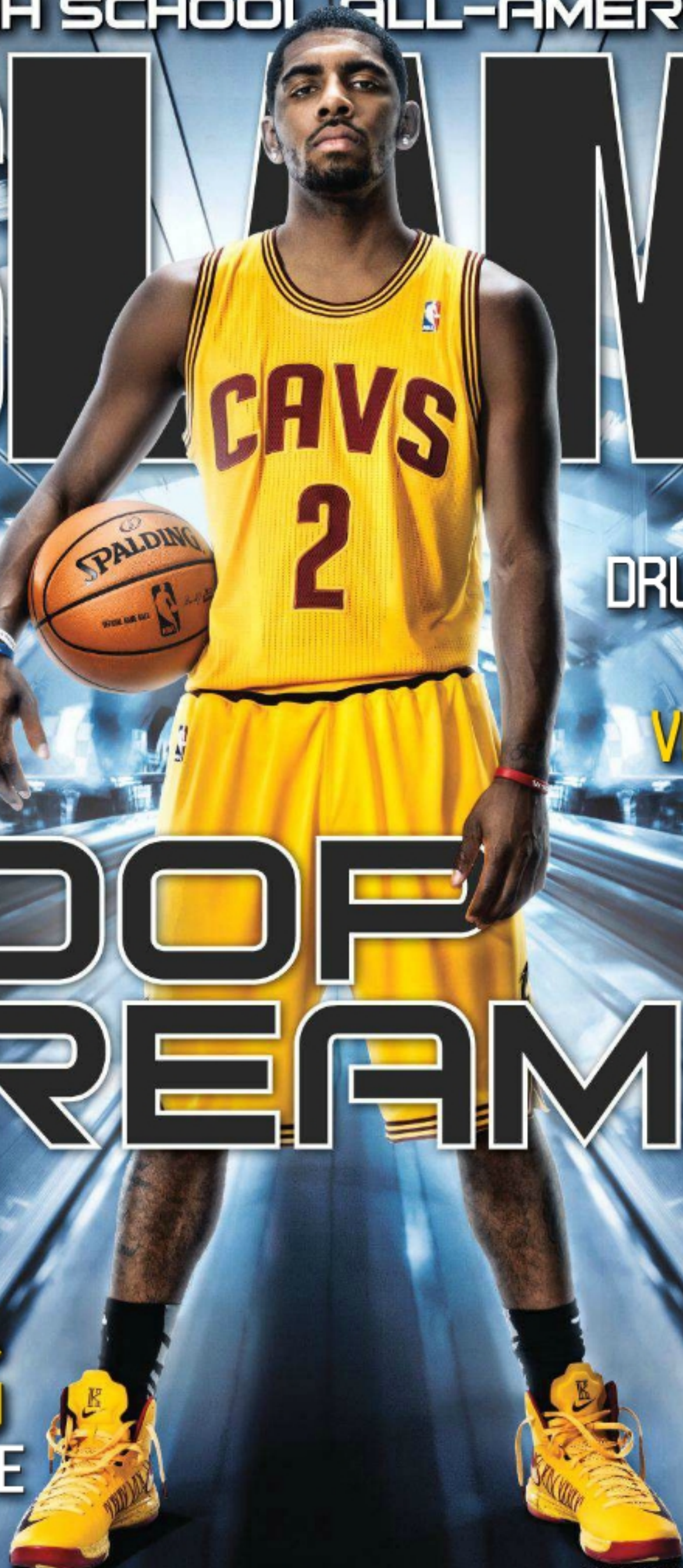
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BURKE

GREIVIS  
VASQUEZ

SKYLAR  
DIGGINS

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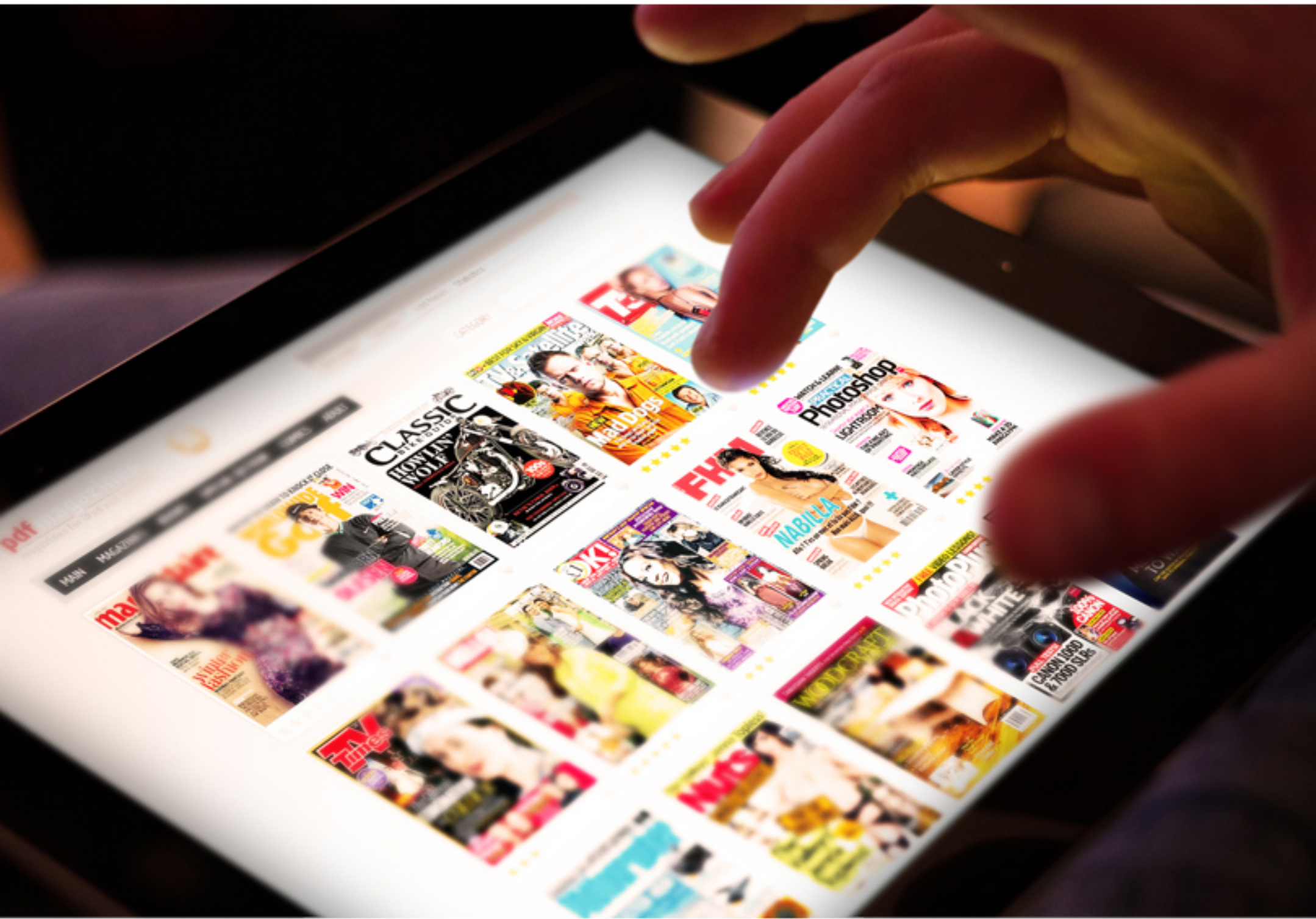
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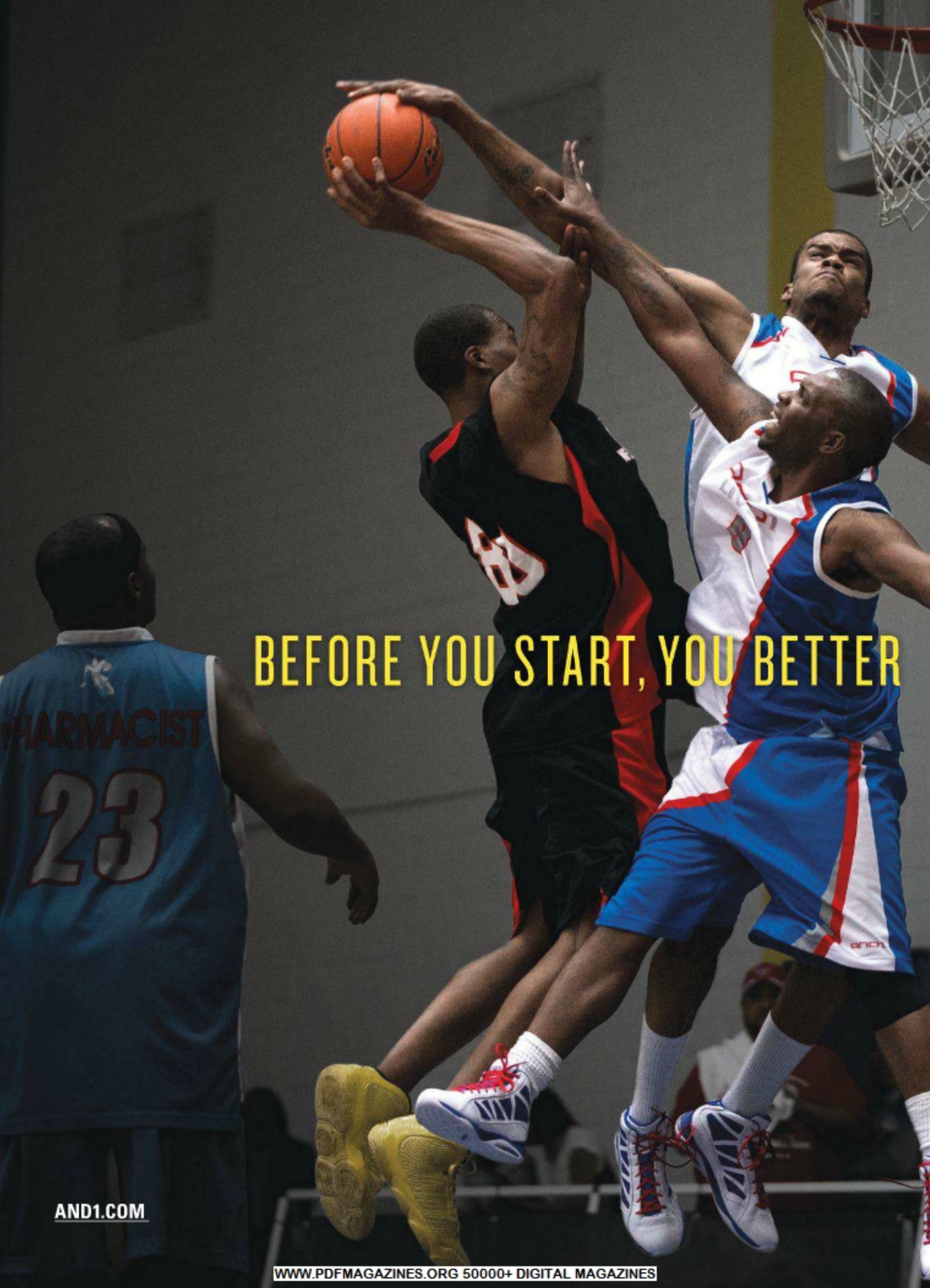
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JUL 2013

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# IN THE PAINT

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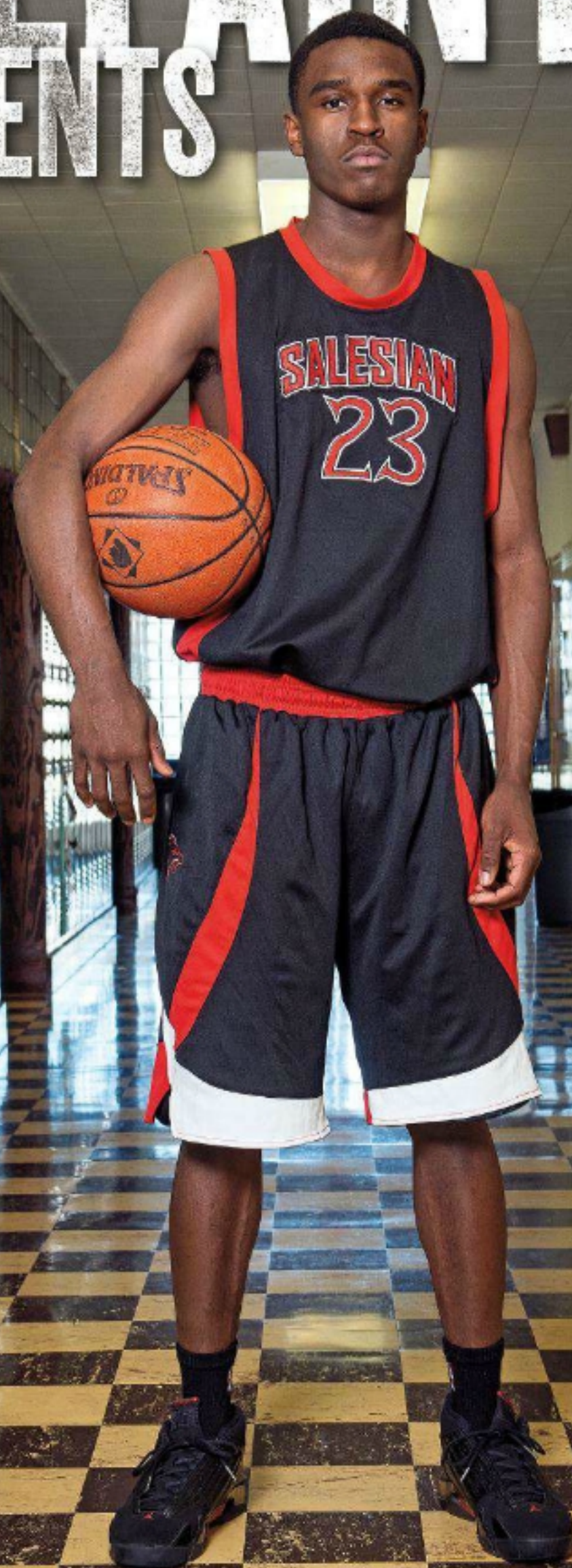
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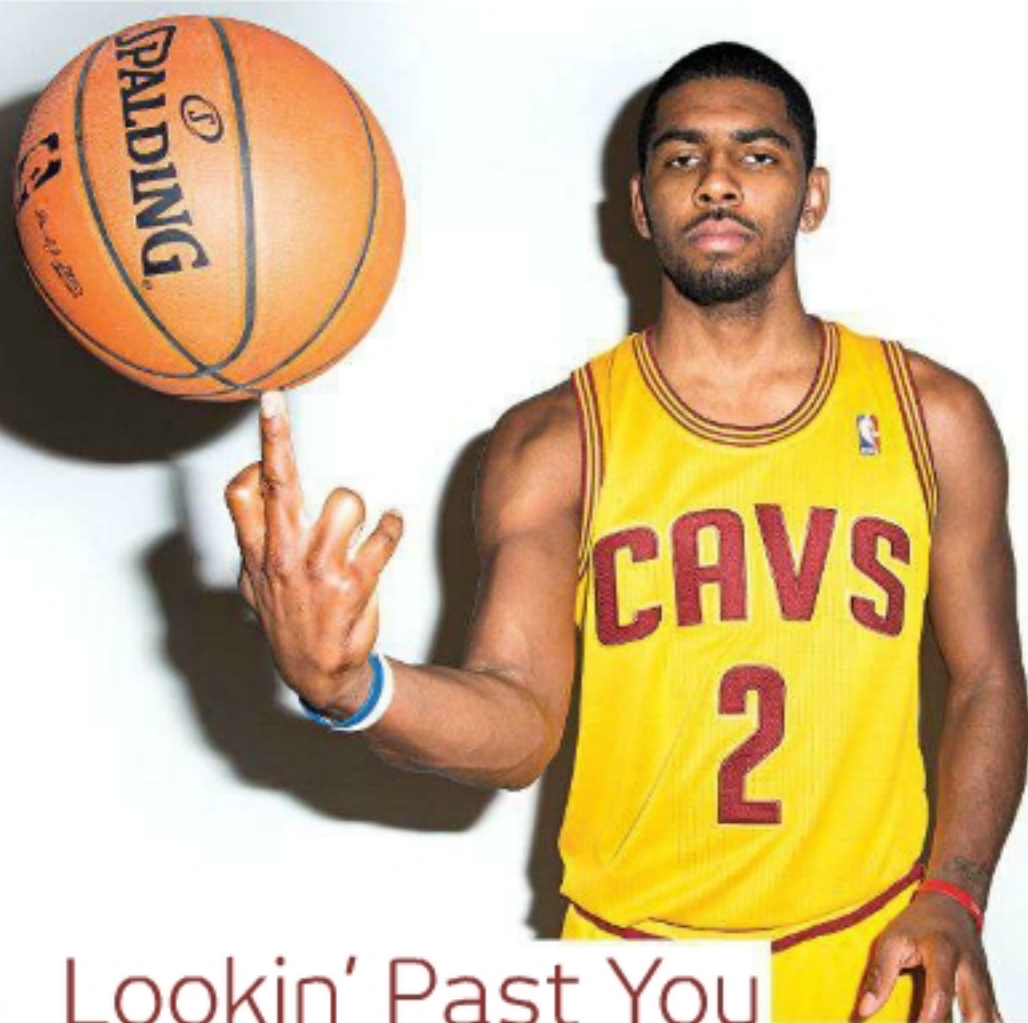
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## Lookin' Past You

What are you supposed to do when you're making an issue that drops deep in the Playoffs, you're not too confident in any team making the Finals other than the Heat, and you already have the Heat's best player on your current cover? In our case, we thought about rolling our dice with the amazing Kevin Durant (about whom we do have a great feature written by our main man Lang Whitaker, making his last appearance as Editor-at-Large. In case you missed his goodbye on "The Links," he's now busy making [NBA.com](http://NBA.com) a whole lot better. Best of luck, LW!), but KD's Thunder were a bit of a question mark even before Russell Westbrook got hurt. Instead, we took a step back...to look ahead.

And what did we see in our crystal ball? A whole lot of Kyrie Irving. His game is sick, corporate America loves him (you don't know the half of it yet), and, most importantly, our crack research team (read: those of us who pay attention to Twitter @messages and Instagram comments) has deduced that SLAM fans are huge Kyrie fans. All this added up to hollering at his team about getting him on his first-ever SLAM cover. With the help of the good folks at 24/7 Sports Management, we made it happen. Once we got Kyrie locked in and tasked Associate Editor Adam Figman with explaining how the future belongs to Kyrie, we rolled with the concept and delivered an issue that became dedicated, largely, to players on the verge. Besides the cover subject, that includes the potential "next Kyrie" (Trey Burke), the most-beloved WNBA rookie ever (Skylar Diggins), Venezuela's first basketball star (Greivis Vasquez), a gentle giant ready to turn the Pistons around (Andre Drummond), and best of all, our annual High School All-American team, presented in their glorious custom SLAM jerseys. Just consider this your 2015 study guide and thank us later.

Peace,

Ben Osborne

## Off the Bench: Tracy Weissenberg



SLAM Contributing Writer Tracy Weissenberg makes her largest impact in print this month with her In Your Face on JJ Hickson (pg. 18), but she's been a big part of our team for a few years now thanks to her great work on SLAMonline. A former employee of the Atlanta Braves who has worked at Turner Sports & NBA Digital for the past five seasons, "The Basketballista" has made her mark on SLAM TV with the video interviews she does with players around the League. As Tracy puts it, "The great aspect of interviewing on camera is the ability to capture interactions and subtleties that do not always come through in writing." For more from this former competitive tennis player, follow her on Twitter @basketballista.

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# SLAM

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# FILA

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THE SPAGHETTI, WORN BY JERRY STACKHOUSE. 



# TRASH TALK

## Missing the Point

First off shout out to the MAG. I've been a reader for 10 years and a subscriber for two and counting—much love. But I gotta say, you guys have got to stop putting LeBron on the cover. I mean, come on guys, there are so many stories. How about my Bulls? The Melo and KD scoring race? The Nuggets' home record? Who knew they were gonna be that good? SPREAD THE LOVE! Otherwise though, I love you guys, do what you do. I'm a fan forever.

**Basketball Jones // Chi-Town till I die**

*Again, it was LeBron's first cover of the season.*

—Ed.

What's up SLAM? I'm 13 years old and I'm a big time basketball fan, and I gotta say thanks for giving Kobe the Slamadamonth in SLAM 168. I love your mag. But man I'm so tired of people giving the Lakers a lot of crap cuz they didn't do well this year. They don't realize that the Lakers had, like, a billion injuries this season. Almost every single player on the roster was injured for a long time, and now Kobe Bryant will be out for 6-9 months. So come on all you Laker haters, give them some credit for making the Playoffs. And thanks to Trash Talker Jonathon Harris for recognizing Kobe's greatness in SLAM 168. John Puppington // San Diego, CA

When I received my June issue and read TRASH TALK, I had to write in. In regard to the Kobe/Mike comparisons, Mike has six rings, Kobe has five. So how does that make Kobe the greatest player to play this game? He is not equal to Mike. He wants to be like Mike. And let's not forget Kobe had Shaq for 3 of them. (Mike had Scottie and Rodman who are Hall of Famers, however they were not Shaq!) The only way I see Kobe getting another ring is if he joins the Heat!

And also, I saw where the dude who wrote in and said he was a subscriber until March 2018. But I am a subscriber until August 2018! Here is my label to prove it! Chuck Ingram // Florissant, MO  
*This dude is also telling the truth per the mailing label he sent. I'm actually kind of into this "who's got the longest*

*SLAM subscription?" contest. —Ed.*

Here's an idea for LeBron James in next year's Dunk Contest: re-enact that dunk from the March 18th game against the Celtics you guys showed in the last issue by setting up a Jason Terry piñata in front of the goal doing his lame-ass "Jet" pose and then have Pitbull or Rick Ross lob a pass to James. LeBron would jump up, catch the ball, smash through the piñata to complete the dunk and land over the broken pieces of Jason Terry, all while M.I.A.'s "Paper Planes" plays overhead. 'Nuff said. Bryant Flores // Wrightsville, AR

I have been a subscriber to your fine magazine since it first came out. It is a joy to read each month as it talks about the old and the new, amongst other matters. In your last issue, you had an article by "a massive Knicks fan" with a sweet tale of how his family has supported the Knicks with equal love in the old and modern days. The writer, actor Jessie Eisenberg, talks of how his love for the Knicks is in his blood as he is the third generation. I am only the second generation but my children, which are the third generation, love the Knicks as well. I have been going to games for over 60 years, including a recent spectacular playoff win against the Celtics. The ironic part of his article, which has only one picture, that of the great Earl "The Pearl" Monroe, is that Eisenberg mentions that Earl was part of the 1970 team. For the record, Earl



was not a part of this team that won the first world championship for the Knicks. He was part of the 1972-1973 team, which was the second, and last, championship in their history of 67 years (my age as well!). The Pearl was traded from Baltimore to the Knicks in 1971. This error is embarrassing—how did it get past all your editors?

Alan D. Rosenberg // New York, NY  
*Definitely our fault on the edit team. Appreciate your sentiments and correction. —Ed.*

I'm a big fan of SLAM. I love the game of basketball. I won a state championship in 2004. I had dreams to play pro. I'm 5-5 and can dunk. I got in trouble as a young kid. When LeBron was in high school, I was a few feet away from dunking on him. That was a fun game. Then he made it ASAP to the pros. When I played against him I knew he was going to be the next MJ. If you put LeBron and Blake in a dunk off, I put all my money on LeBron. But he need to go back to

the Cavs. Him and Kyrie Irving make a good match. Keep it up, King—I'm still going to watch you from jail. I hope to see him on the next All-Star weekend on that dunk list. I would like to say shoutout to my Mom, Dad, Lil Sister, Lil Brother, my homies, RIP Ready Rock, RIP Duck. And forget my haters. And tell them cheerleaders to write me.

Tyrone Dunston // Somerset, PA

## Game on Lock

This isn't really "Trash Talk," more like a thank you. I'm thanking you because I'm currently locked up in a juvie jail and your magazines keep me updated on everything basketball from NCAA to NBA to WNCAA to WNBA. Soon as I'm released I will be back on track to make the NBA. Thank you so much SLAM. Eric J // Sylmar, CA

I've been a subscriber to "SLAM" for almost a year now and I love "all" your articles from "HYPE" all the way to the end of the "BACKBOARD"



**twitter feed: here's some highlights of what readers told @SLAMonline about Issue 168**

@vado242: cover is the truth // @jackJMACdavis: Great article @nate\_robinson. Dude plays with hella heart and is so underrated // @sleepsoteric: HOW IS #JERRYSTACKHOUSE PLAYING IN AN #NBAPLAYOFFS GAME RIGHT NOW?! @SLAMonline was calling him The Next Jordan when Selena was still alive. // @CBkillin21: I feel Dave Zirin's article on B Knight



you cover everything. I never really took the time to read "TRASH TALK" (what was I thinking?) until recently in issue #167 with Jabari Parker and Andrew Wiggins on the cover. Anyways I decided to give it a try. What caught my attention was the shout out to Chris Bosh from a neighborhood friend of his who is incarcerated, like me.

After reading what he said, a light bulb flashed in my head; I remembered an article you did on one of my neighborhood pals, he was chosen for the "Hustle & Flow" section, yep (Kendrick Perkins) so I wanted to shed a little sunshine on him for a minute. I gotta say I was very shocked when he got drafted to the Celtics straight from the best high school in Beaumont, TX (Clifton J. Ozen), but of course how could I forget that he dominated the paint from his freshman to his senior year all on "Varsity" (check his high school stats!)? He also helped lead them to a "State Championship" in '02-03! Obviously he's still bringing the noise or you wouldn't have acknowledged him from the start. I was hoping you would consider putting him in a longer story in the future; he has become a well-rounded big man. All I have to say is, Keep doing your thing, KP, and show them how we Texas boys do it. Ima hold you down regardless no matter what team you playing for. Thank you for your time SLAM, you are the best! Die-hard fan, faithful subscriber. Peace!  
Clabome Gallen AKA Clay-G // Hughes Unit, Gatesville, TX  
"Maybe." "Thank you."—Ed.

Hands down you guys are great at what you do. I've been a recipient of SLAM for years, while also being incarcerated (for years). I've avoided a lot of frustration or altercations over the TV not being on the games by just being patient and reading about the sport in my down time. Patient, because I hope to be out of prison and able to follow the league a lot better. I'm an old-school hoops guy, meaning, I came up watching the GOAT (MJ All Day). So, in my search for a new talent to follow, I've been resisting my hometown teams—the Knicks and now, the Nets. I've decided to maintain some hoops fan loyalty and this is how I've become a Bobcats fan in a New York Correctional Facility. Being a Bobcats follower is not easy...at

the moment. But I feel obligated to make some NOYZ and offer some motivation and advice to the people making decisions for the Bobcats. Whatever you do, please don't draft a guard this year. If this kid Tony Mitchell (North Texas, 6-8, 235 pounds, jumping out of the gym) is available, take a chance with him. And, consider moving Kidd-Gilchrist for some defensive-minded bodies. Keep Kemba. The key is to bring some excitement to the franchise, and you'll be surprised at who else is going to want to come play for the Bobcats....Yep, I'm thinking about moving to Charlotte when I get out. I'm just a brotha trying to assist MJ and save the Bobcats!  
Roger Reid // Otisville, NY

This may not be related to current events but a key part of basketball culture: basketball video games. Is it just me, or have they been progressively getting worse? It's an odd time for basketball games; for some reason, the great *NBA Street* series is unfairly extinct. Also, the new games feel too virtual and fake.

I would have to say that *ESPN NBA 2K5* is the greatest game. Period. What 99.9% of people do not understand is the balance of a game—introducing new features while improving existing gameplay. *2K5* was the most balanced, whereas *2K12* and '13 have all the new features but the gameplay is atrocious (ever try passing?) plus has many bugs. *2K5* had great graphics as well, for 2004 standards. Even with all the technology since then some of the new animations look nothing like the players. *24/7* game mode was so chill and amazing compared to the monotonous and boring newer modes. *2K5* has the Greatest Soundtrack Ever! Dope underground beats, gives me chills to this day.

Still not convinced? Pick up a *2K5* for cheap online and you'll see. The *2K5* and *NBA Street* games were far ahead of their time. They don't make 'em like they used to. Peace.  
John Slade // Sandy, UT

I am 7 3/4 years old and go to Dows Lane Elementary School. I am a BIG NBA fan and love that your magazine is just about basketball. My favorite teams are the Knicks and Thunder. Every day I practice. My dream is to be in the NBA and win a championship. Miles Demarest // Tarrytown, NY  
Good luck, Miles!—Ed.



goes against the "SLAM mentality". The rest of y'all should aspire to be like Dave. // @TGODMcGrizzly31: @SLAMonline this the best twitter account that i follow // @KingR2J: I wanted to get a @SLAMonline but ya'll have LeBron too damn much. We know he's great, WE GET IT! When will you get @StephenCurry30 on it? // @MarcusDeSean: #YESSIR I almost have every @slamonline cover with king-james on it! #KingKnowKing #GreatnessOnlyAllowed // @TylerTheKreator: When is @StephenCurry30 gonna get a @SLAMonline cover





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## THE OPENING TIP ALWAYS BY RICK TELANDER

Here's the deal: Pro athletes who know anything about the rest of the world truly respect elite athletes in other sports. And the ones who are really in the know, well, they respect NBA stars the most. As they should.

This past season, we got some serious bro love going from hockey to hoops—and vice versa, via Patrick Kane of the Chicago Blackhawks and LeBron James of the Heat. While the Blackhawks were en route to a record-setting, season-opening 24-game points streak, the Heat were on a winning streak of their own, one that would stretch into late March and finish at 27, the second-longest in NBA history.

"At my first hockey game. Pretty Damn cool," James would tweet on February 2 from

the Air Canada Centre in Toronto.

When the Blackhawks had a 22-game points streak going, and the Heat were at 15 games, sports geeks started debating which was more difficult to achieve. Apples and oranges, of course. But Kane, the Blackhawks ballerina-like skating and scoring phenom, didn't care. He told everyone how much he admired the Heat, and especially James. "I've been a fan of LeBron ever since he's been criticized heavily," said Kane. "He's come back to prove all of his critics wrong."

The King fired back with the tweet, "Hey Chicago Blackhawks, u guys are AWESOME!! #streaking."

That was on March 6. On March 27, Kane got

to meet his man in Chicago, and posted this: "Me and @KingJames before the bulls-heat game tonight at the UC. What a game. Wow."

That's where this photo came from. And if it looks like some big "El Heat" dude with his arm around a little boy from the United Center peanut gallery, that's just how the 5-11, 180-pound, baby-faced Kane rolls. Bron-Bron's got him by nine inches, 70 pounds and a ton of muscle. They both have moves that are sick. But it's cool as can be that a hockey superstar appreciates a fellow superstar in another, vastly different sport. And surely, deep inside, Kane knows that skating is one thing, but being able to fly with a hammer is a whole different universe.

**INSIDE:** The fastest basketball player ever /// Home and Away with DeMarcus Cousins /// Homegirl Skylar Diggins /// Trinidad James + more...



IN YOUR FACE

## THE NEXT 1

**Trey Burke**  
University of Michigan

When Michigan star point guard Trey Burke is asked to name the NBA players he tries to model his game after, Tony Parker, Rajon Rondo and Chris Paul come up. What do all three of those All-NBA guards have in common? Not one of them knows what it feels like to put a bewildered university on his shoulders and guide it back to national prominence. But Burke does.

"This program hasn't been this far in two decades," says Burke, a native of Columbus, OH, who led UM to the Championship game as a sophomore. "Just to be back in this situation definitely means the world to the alumni, and it means the world to us. Last year when I came back, I announced to the media that I wanted to compete for a National Championship. A lot of people looked at me like I was crazy."

If you watched any of Michigan this past season, you already know that the 6-1 late bloomer—he was not offered a scholarship from Ohio State, the school he grew up around the way from—isn't crazy...just crazy skilled. He's gutsy in the lane (166 free-throws attempted as a sophomore), polished with the pass (a school-record 260 assists this year) and big when it matters (YouTube him). Maybe he does have something in common with Parker, Rondo and Paul after all.

On the season, the 20-year-old averaged 18.6 ppg, 6.7 apg, 3.2 rpg and 1.6 spg. In the process, he became the first Wolverine to win the Wooden Award as the best college player. "My teammates and coaching staff put me in this position," says Burke, who also snagged AP POY honors and the Oscar Robertson Trophy. "I wouldn't be able to receive those awards without them. I wouldn't even be in the talk."

After the heartbreaking title loss to Louisville, Burke could have easily deflected questions about the game and instead entertained ones about his bright NBA future that, after declaring for the Draft, is set to begin in June. But he didn't. "I still haven't been able to really grasp it, really," Burke says. "I've had a good career so far, but I think this would have been the icing on the cake. To not be able to get it done as a team hurts me personally. I wanted to win this bad." —**DEMARCO WILLIAMS**



UM ATHLETICS

## NOYZ

That Jay-Z x Nets marriage was barely longer than Kris and Kim's. But now Jay's going to change the agent game. Maybe?.....The Rockets made the Playoffs! As an 8 seed! Daryl Morey is the greatest executive in the history of the NBA!.....We don't know Mike Dunlap very well, but for a team with young players that was primarily motivated to keep costs down, we found his hiring creative and intriguing. The Cats





# LINE OF THE MONTH

BY SHANNON BOOHER

**Line of the Month:** Carmelo Anthony: 1 Scoring Title; JR Smith: 1 Sixth Man of the Year Award. After grabbing a couple of individual honors and the East's No. 2 seed, following years and years of ineptitude, the Knicks have truly regained NBA relevance with a regular season to remember. With a little bit of a Playoff run, this season will go down as a success. But in NYC, success breeds expectations, so be sure the city is going to be asking for a lot more next year.

## Lyrics of the Month:

"H-Town my second home like I'm James Harden/

Money counter go burrr, when you sellin' out the Garden," Drake, "No New Friends," *Suffering From Success*. It has been a breakout season for James Harden, on and off the court. He started to bubble up last season, but his name has been dropped in lyric after lyric this season, as evidenced by Drizzy's verse off of DJ Khaled's upcoming album.

**A Tale of Two Lees of the Month:** For David Lee, the 2012-13 season was the best of times and the worst of times. He led the League in double-doubles and made the All-Star team, only to have his name become synonymous with horrific interior defense at the Sloan Conference. He helped lead the Warriors back to the Playoffs—marking his first ever post-season appearance—only to go down in Game 1 with a season-ending injury. No doubt he will remember this season as a gift and a curse.



# WHICH NBA PLAYER ARE YOU?

BY SAM RUBENSTEIN



## CHRIS HEMSWORTH IS DEMARCUS COUSINS

### THE BODY

Chris has the action hero physique, which is how he got from the Australian Outback and *A Cabin in the Woods* to *The Avengers*. DeMarcus has what NBA GMs covet; size, strength and the length to bang with any other big men out there.

### ANGER

As Thor, Chris could have lived a good life as the *God of Thunder*, son of the king. But his temper and pride forced him to prove himself in battle, leading to his fall. DeMarcus can't seem to keep that temper under control, whether feuding with players, coaches or officials.

### LONELY

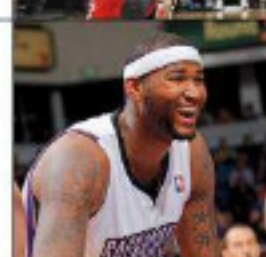
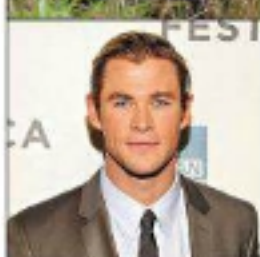
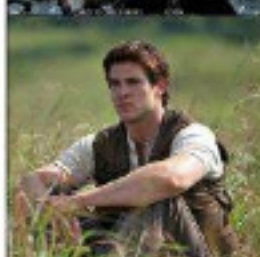
Starring opposite Kristen Stewart in a movie is like playing for the Sacramento Kings. One day you look around at your co-workers and think to yourself, "This is who I have to work with?" DeMarcus could be making the move to rainy Washington state soon—like Bella Swan!

### OVERSHADOWED

Cousins is great, but he may always be remembered as someone who played with John Wall—on the cusp of true stardom—in college. Hemsworth has a brother named Liam, who plays Gale in *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Girls like him.

### FUTURE

A *Thor* sequel is coming, and more *Avengers* movies, as Chris' star is clearly on the rise. DeMarcus has been through some storms, but one day he will cash in as a free agent, whether in Sacramento/Seattle or somewhere else.



played hard all year and their young players seemed to develop. So what did MJ and Co. do? Fire him! Unless you can pull off a free-agent heist like the Heat did in 2010, it takes three years, often many more, to build a Championship-caliber team, yet there are franchises out there changing their plan every 18 months. Makes no sense. At least the Cats skillfully tanked their way into having the best chance at the first pick in the Draft. Oh.....Shout out to that dude "LosGanajesBakers".....



IN YOUR FACE

## PAIN & GAIN

**JJ Hickson**  
Portland Trail Blazers

Sacrifice can be a double-edged sword. Take JJ Hickson's '12-13 season: The 6-9, 242-pound athlete played out of position as center for the Blazers. While that distinction meant he started every game, averaging career-highs in field goal percentage (56) and rebounds (10.4), it also meant that he took a pounding, matching up against players multiple inches taller and thicker. When the Blazers' 82 came to a conclusion, GM Neil Olshey publicly questioned Hickson's future with the organization. And it makes sense: The natural power forward is likely to command more money and minutes in the open market than the Blazers are willing to provide.

"I just came in with the mindset of, 'I'm gonna do whatever they want me to do,'" says Hickson, "as far as being on the court, whatever's going to get me on the court."

Over the course of 80 games this past season, Hickson's 40 double-doubles almost equaled his four-year career total of 41. Additionally, the NC State product posted an average of 12.7 ppg in 29 minutes of high-flying action per game.

"I think Ben Wallace feels my pain!" jokes Hickson of amassing those stats all while playing out of position.

The Blazers ended the season on a 13-game losing streak, but a lot of positives can be drawn for Hickson. After all, he was given a season to realize both his potential and limitations. With the right situation, and in the right position, he proved he could bring a lot to a team.

"Guys in the basketball world respect guys who play hard," says Hickson. "As long as I gain people's respect, that's all I ask for." —TRACY WEISSEBERG



# NOYZ

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT FOR ALL AVERAGE NBA PLAYERS, AKA THE MAJORITY OF NBA PLAYERS: You do NOT need a personal publicist in addition to your team and agent PR. The good publicists are too expensive for you, and the bad ones, who know little about the NBA and probably less about grammar, will just make you look bad. You can thank us later.....RU kidding?.....



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SUNDAY, AUG. 11  
BALTIMORE

SATURDAY, JUNE 22  
KANSAS CITY

SATURDAY, JULY 13  
CHICAGO

SATURDAY, AUG. 17  
LOS ANGELES

SUNDAY, JUNE 30  
LOUISVILLE

SATURDAY, JULY 20  
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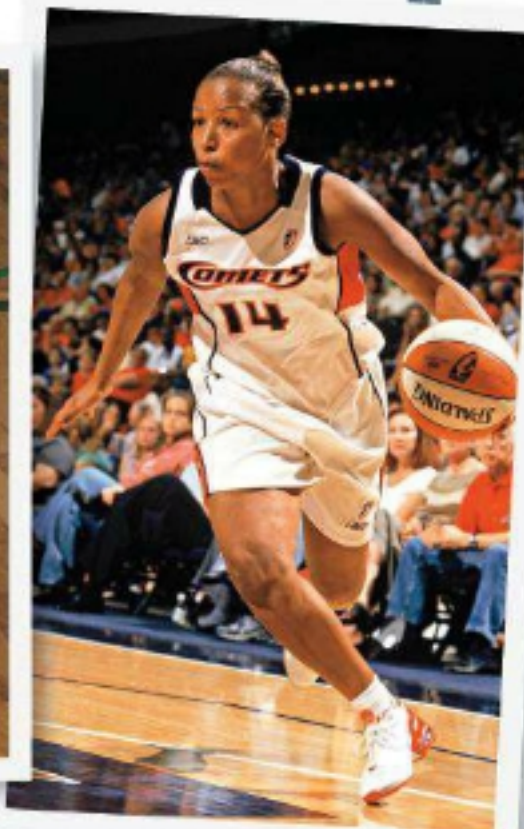
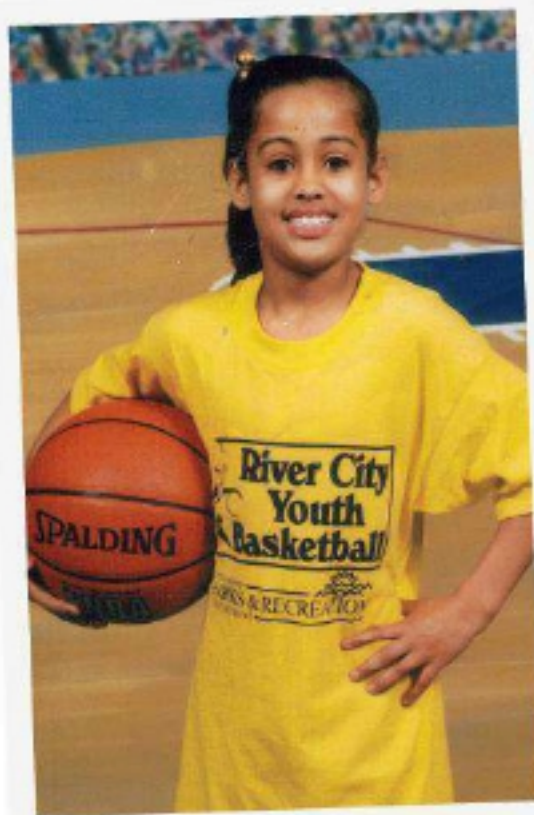
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SUITES  
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## A JONES FOR INDIANA

Though Skylar Diggins is repping Tulsa now, her life-long home of South Bend, IN, will never be too far in her rearview. By Yaron Weitzman



**SLAM:** Tell us a little bit about your hometown.

**SD:** I grew up in South Bend, IN. Because Notre Dame is right there, South Bend is a big football town. But Indiana is also a huge basketball state where people take the sport very seriously, which is the environment I grew up in.

**SLAM:** Where'd you spend most of your time in South Bend?

**SD:** The Martin Luther King Jr Community Center—I call it "The Center." I was there all day, every day working on my game. That's really where I learned how to play and where I developed my skills.

**SLAM:** Who taught you how to play?

**SD:** Well, I started playing when I was about 5 or 6 years old. I tried soccer and softball

(Maurice Scott, her stepfather—Ed.), who works at the MLK Jr Center, used to coach boys. But then when I got to be like 10 or 11, we found a bunch of other girls who really wanted to play. So we made a team and he became my coach.

**SLAM:** Did those teams play against girls or guys?

**SD:** Before we made that team, until I was about 10, I only played on teams with guys. Then at 10 I wasn't allowed to anymore, but our girls team did play against boys teams. I did that until I turned 13—then we joined the AAU circuit and there we only played against girls.

**SLAM:** Mark Cuban said he'd consider drafting Brittney Griner? Would you want a shot at the NBA?

**SD:** If anyone could do it, it's Brittney. But you know, it's funny: in our sport, we're always trying to compare ourselves to the guys and stuff like that. I just want to play the women's game. I've always dreamed about playing in the WNBA, and now that that opportunity has come around, I'm going to take it and run with it. I've never been a person who felt like I had to prove myself playing against guys.

**SLAM:** Growing up, were you a fan of the WNBA?

**SD:** I loved that Houston Comets dynasty team at the beginning of the WNBA. The one with Cynthia Cooper, Sheryl Swoopes and Tina Thompson. I really loved Cynthia Cooper. She changed the game.

**SLAM:** Was she a person you modeled your game after?

**SD:** For sure. And lots of others. I try to take something from every good player, man or woman. Like how Tamika Catchings plays defense. How Diana Taurasi—she just has that dog in her

and will kill anybody to get some buckets. And Kobe, too—he's the same way. They're both aggressive and can take over a game on both ends of the floor and just have that "refuse to lose" attitude. Not a lot of players have that.

**SLAM:** Have you been able to meet any of those players you admired growing up?

**SD:** I actually just got to meet Sheryl Swoopes, who was a player I always looked up to. I remember when I was a kid going to a game and seeing her play, and then waiting for her outside the arena with my mom for, like, an hour. So meeting her was pretty cool. I didn't tell her that story, though [laughs].

**SLAM:** What was the worst job you had growing up?

**SD:** I never really worked when I was a kid [laughs]. Can I tell you what my best job was?

**SLAM:** Please.

**SD:** I had a job working with kids when I was younger, like doing skills camps and things like that. I thought that was pretty dope. I really liked that.

**SLAM:** Do you get sick of all the questions about being an attractive women's basketball player?

**SD:** Well, I get it a lot more than you would expect, and I really don't know what people want me to say. I'm not the type to walk around and say, Look at me, I'm so pretty. I just play the game and let people say whatever they want to say, and if they're watching our games, then I really don't care. Sometimes the stuff said touches a nerve, but as long as people understand that I work hard on my craft and that's why I've been able to get to where I am today, well I guess then it's OK.



before-hand, but basketball just kind of stuck with me. So before I started playing, my dad

**NOYZ**

Shout out to our girl Shoni Schimmel for making this year's women's NCAA Tourney more entertaining than the men's—at least until the Championship Games....With players like her and Breanna Stewart in college and the WNBA boasting big-name rookies such as the one on this page, as well as a relatively healthy new TV deal, women's hoops is on the come-up in general. If the Gonzalez twins





# SUPERSONIC

**Usain Bolt, the fastest man alive and a big NBA fan, speaks on running, dunking and his favorite player and team, Kevin Garnett and the Boston Celtics.**

Thanks to his epic performance on the world stage at the 2012 Olympics in London, where he became the first man to win the 100-m and 200-m double at successive Games, Usain Bolt needed no introduction when he took center court at the 2013 Sprint NBA All-Star Celebrity Game in Houston. In a game full of megawatt celebrities, the world's fastest human—and his signature lightning-bolt pose—stole the show when, in the waning minutes of the first quarter, he switched gears and sprinted past the defense on a “fast” break for a wicked two-handed slam dunk. SLAM caught up with the Gatorade pitchman and self-proclaimed “greatest athlete to live” to talk about his love of hoops and why he’s a ride-or-die Boston Celtics fan.

**SLAM:** What was it like playing in the celebrity game at All-Star Weekend?

**UB:** It was fun. We got beat bad, because their team was much more serious and played a little harder than I thought they would, but I really enjoyed it and it’s something I would do again. Kevin Hart made me laugh the whole time I was on the court. He said ridiculous stuff, so it was fun to get to do that with him.

**SLAM:** And you caught a nice dunk.

**UB:** I’m more of a better soccer player than a basketball player, but I’m 6-5 so I can throw down. I can dunk.

**SLAM:** How much of a basketball fan are you?

**UB:** I’m a big basketball fan. It’s a lot of teams, but I’m a Boston Celtic fan. I’ve been a Celtic fan since Kevin Garnett got there. I was a Timberwolves fan and then became a Boston

fan when KG came. I’m a KG fan. Everywhere KG goes, I support.

**SLAM:** Why do you like KG so much?

**UB:** KG for me, he’s a fighter, he’s a leader, he’s a Champion. I seen him go through a lot. He’s very tough mentally, and he goes out there and plays hard and always gives 150 percent. So for me, that’s the biggest thing. Even when he was injured, he was always there with his team, always supporting them, always pushing them to be the best, so for me, that’s something big. That’s a leadership quality that I like and appreciate.

**SLAM:** You’re a freak of nature on the track.

**Who’s your equivalent in the NBA?**

**UB:** I’d say right now LeBron, but I think Kobe, everything he does, I’m like, “Oh God.” That’s what you say when Kobe does something amazing. But I’m not surprised.

**SLAM:** How often do you play ball these days?

**UB:** I played basketball all my life growing up, but because I do track, my coaches never let me play, and they always try to stop me from playing, so I stopped. I don’t get to play a lot of basketball anymore.

**SLAM:** How many times a day do you get challenged to a race by random people?

**UB:** I get challenged to races every day. Anywhere I go, I get that.

**SLAM:** Is it possible to break your own record?

**UB:** I train hard and I work really hard for what I want, so I think there’s a possibility that I can go faster and break my own record, yes.

—MAURICE BOBB



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can actually play (hard to know much about the comp in Idaho), they may be the tipping point.....  
BTW, Louisville athletics in general deserve major props. ACC ADs better be ready to work.....  
Pretty soon there will be fewer schools Tubby Smith hasn't coached at than ones he has.....



IN YOUR FACE

## THE LAST JUMP

**Martell Webster**  
Washington Wizards

The last time Martell Webster's name was in these pages as more than a footnote, the Trail Blazers had just made him the No. 6 pick in the '05 NBA Draft, the last year high schoolers could make the jump straight to the L. Then a teenage prep star from Seattle, WA, Webster would get to stay in the Pacific Northwest.

But before this season, after being miscast and suffering a slew of injuries in Portland and later Minnesota, the 6-7 wing signed a one-year deal in Washington, where he carved out a role as one of the NBA's best long-range shooters and posted career-highs in nearly every statistical category, including minutes (28.9 per game), points (11.4) and three-point shooting (42 percent).

Webster says he prefers not to critique his own game bit by bit, but acknowledges that he's had a hardwood revival in DC. How?

"Just experience," he says. "You begin to prioritize. Your individual game and certain things aren't important anymore, like trying to score all the points, prove to everybody I can dribble and whatnot. That's not a big factor; it's just playing the game and getting wins."

And while the Wizards may only have won 29 games, Webster was part of a combination that—when finally at full strength, health-wise—had Washington looking the part of a Playoff contender post-All-Star break. In the midst of that run, on March 16, he dropped a career-best 34 points in a win over the Suns, including seven treys.

Having finally tapped into his considerable potential by finding a niche as a floor-spreading swingman, Webster wishes he could have given his younger self some advice.

"Let the game come to you. Don't try to force anything; play off your teammates. That's the most important thing," says the 26-year-old, having wrapped up his eighth season. "A lot of guys come into the League thinking that it's most important to have the ball in their hands. But you can be very effective—as effective as having the ball in your hands—without it in your hands, you just have to know how to move without it."

—ABE SCHWADRON



# NOYZ

Shout out to the Black Falcon for living up to his nickname with every contested dunk he pulls off. That reverse joint over Anthony Randolph in the first round had serious Slamada potential if NBA Photos had only, you know, gotten the photo.....Gerald Wallace might have to change that nickname to CrasheD, no?.....What's up, Ricky Ledo?.....Can someone teach our guy Dinos Trigonis about the BCC



# ROOKIE DIARY

# BRAD BEAL

## Man, the season went by...

so fast. Now that it's over, I'm back in DC. I'm working with the training staff and otherwise hanging at the crib. Things slow down a bit when the season ends, so I also have time to reflect on what I did throughout the year. Otherwise, my days are boring now. I don't have nothing to do except lift, rehab and chill. Basically, that's all I can do.

## I learned a lot...

this year, both on and off the court. My teammates gave me life lessons—how to handle certain situations and how to make decisions that are smart for you. Like, when I was injured, they told me to stop playing and not to push it because I have a bright future ahead of me that I shouldn't jeopardize. On the court, my IQ grew from experience and from playing, and my teammates and coaches did a good job helping me adjust, too.

## Before the season...

I wanted to beat the numbers (31.2 mpg, 13.9 ppg, 3.8 rpg) I put up. But I definitely take pride in what I did do. A lot of rookies don't even get to play, so to be one of the youngest in the Draft and score 10-plus points a game and play the amounts of minutes I played, yeah, I can take pride in that. But I still have a lot of room to grow.

## One of the most surprising things about this season...

was the amount of respect I got. It was different. I mean, I wasn't necessarily surprised, but it kind of hit me like, These guys know and respect me now. That was pretty

function in email?.....Lot of Washington Wizards in HYPE this month, huh?..... We see you, Robbie Rockwell.....

cool to have, knowing that I'm just starting to succeed a little bit. But I've still got a lot of work to do of course.

## I'll mainly be home in...

St. Louis and in DC this summer. I might go to Florida for a little bit, just to get away, work out with Coach Donovan a bit. I'm debating a vacation, too. I want to take one but I don't know where to go, so it's still up in the air. But the guys say I need to take one.

## This is my last...

Rookie Diary with SLAM. Thanks for reading this year. I want to thank the man upstairs, of course. I want to thank my family for always supporting me. And I want to thank my teammates and coaches, too. Peace!

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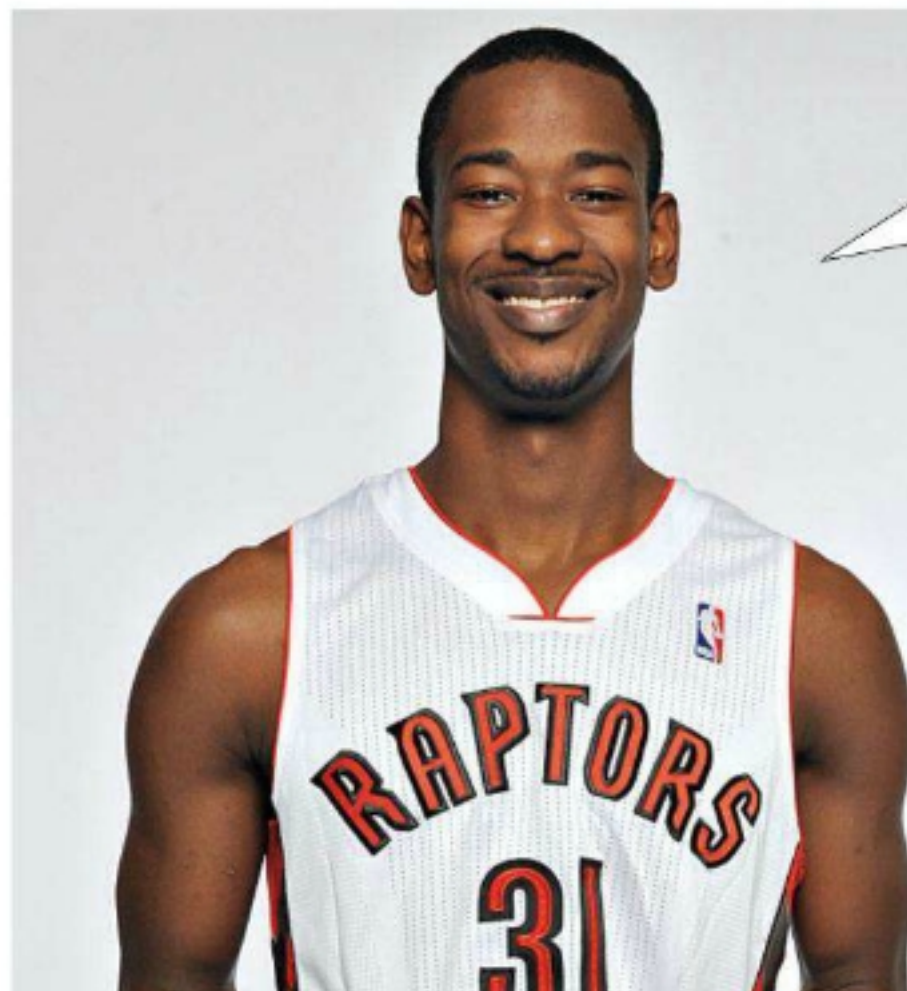
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## BOUNCE, BOUNCE

Dunk Contest winner Terrence Ross and "All Gold Everything" rapper Trinidad James have both had rookie years to remember. By Tzvi Twersky

*When I won...*

the Dunk Contest, I saw Drake on the sidelines going crazy. After that night, I was hanging out with him for a couple of days. It was definitely cool, and since the Dunk Contest, I've been getting a little more attention.

*Trinidad James...*

is cool. I've been listening to Trinidad's remix to "All Gold Everything" lately. The original song was dope, and the remix is definitely tight, too, because he has TI, Jeezy and 2 Chainz on it.

*Before games...*

toward the end of the season, I was listening to that new ASAP album, that Kendrick album. It's kind of those two with like a little Meek Mill. That gets me hyped.

*Off the court...*

I look for something mellow, something with a story, something that gets you away. Growing up, I went to a few concerts and I listened to a lot of Lil Wayne, Young Money.

*The connection between...*

hoops and hip-hop is real. There are a lot of basketball players, like Philly guys Lou Williams [who is from Atlanta but played with the Sixers for seven seasons] and Dion Waiters, who associate themselves with, like, Meek Mill. You can see how rappers and hoopers who come out of an area vibe together.

*I was there for the...*

Dunk Contest. Terrence can fly, man. Terrence can fly. Drake was definitely super-happy for him, because he's from Toronto. That one dunk he did, where he jumped over that kid, was crazy.

*I played...*

organized ball slightly, a little bit in high school. Now I play whenever I get a chance. I'm a guard. I love to shoot—shooting is my forte. I got good knowledge of the game. I really love basketball.

*I grew up...*

on the Bulls, man. MJ, baby. That's my team, that's what it's all about right there. I remember looking at those classic games, against the Utah Jazz, with my parents. My mom and my dad were against Jordan; they went for Utah because it was old school. But I was a Jordan guy. I ride with LeBron now, as far as players go, but the Bulls are, and are always going to be, my team.

*For me, basketball is...*

a mental release. When I'm out there playing basketball I'm just focused on being the best that I can be. I never think about anything negative when I'm playing basketball; I'm only focused on getting the ball in the hoop and making good plays, making my team better, winning games. I'm only focused on positive things, and that's what I like about basketball. It really allows me to be free.



RON TURKIN/BAE VIA BETTY IMAGES; GAVIN GUDRY

**NOYZ**

Cosign: Trinidad DEFINITELY loves to shoot. He is good at it, though.....There go our dreams of one day having a Stephen Jackson, Spurs Assistant Coach business card.....XXL's 2013 freshmen >> NCAA basketball's 2013 freshmen.....In case you were wondering since we don't update you anymore, the ABA is still a mess. Now that the Times started to sniff around, that "league" might actually go away.....



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- B. Regimand, Chicago, IL

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# HYPE

## THE FIRST

Reflecting on Jason Collins' announcement.  
By Dave Zirin



In a bombshell that's as historic as anything the L has seen since Earl Lloyd became the first African American player to suit up in the NBA, 34-year-old center Jason Collins has come out of the closet. This is of course bigger than the NBA. Collins is now the first active player in a major American sports league to be out of the closet. Writing in a first-person piece, with Frank Lidz, for *Sports Illustrated*, Collins said, "I'm a 34-year-old NBA center. I'm black. And I'm gay. I didn't set out to be the first openly gay athlete playing in a major American team sport. But since I am, I'm happy to start the conversation. I wish I wasn't the kid in the classroom raising his hand and saying, 'I'm different.' If I had my way, someone else would have already done this. Nobody has, which is why I'm raising my hand."

The piece has sent shockwaves well beyond the world of sports. The locker room has always been a safe haven of homophobia but recently, the generational changes in our society off the field of play have started to be felt. First in the NFL, players like Brendon Ayanbadejo, Chris Kluwe and Scott Fujita have become active and public participants for full marriage equality and equal rights. Ayanbadejo even announced that there were four players he knew just waiting for the right time to come out. The National Hockey League recently adopted an entire program alongside the You Can Play organization aimed at making the locker room a "safe space" for players thinking about coming out of the closet. Then Brittney Griner, who may prove to be the most dominant women's hoops player ever, spoke casually about being part of the LGBT community. She did it so smoothly, it was a question about whether she was even "coming out of the closet" since that implies she was once "in."



LOUDER THAN A BOMB

Now we have Jason Collins and it's already clear he will have allies. Immediately after the article posted came this tweet from the great Baron Davis, who wrote, "I am so proud of my bro @jasoncollins34 for being real. #FTTheHaters." Kobe Bryant and many other pro athletes quickly followed with supportive comments.

Collins' coming-out story is very powerful. He talks about how the bombing of the Boston Marathon "reinforced the notion that I shouldn't wait for the circumstances of my coming out to be perfect. Things can change in an instant, so why not live truthfully?....No one wants to live in fear. I've always been scared of saying the wrong thing. I don't sleep well. I never have. But each time I tell another person, I feel stronger and sleep a little

more soundly. It takes an enormous amount of energy to guard such a big secret. I've endured years of misery and gone to enormous lengths to live a lie. I was certain that my world would fall apart if anyone knew. And yet when I acknowledged my sexuality I felt whole for the first time. I still had the same sense of humor, I still had the same mannerisms and my friends still had my back."

One of the people who has Jason's back is his twin, slightly younger brother Jarron, who also followed Jason to Stanford and the NBA. As Jason wrote, Jarron was shocked to learn his "big brother" was gay but after they talked, "For the first time in our lives, he wanted to step in and protect me."

The question now, however, that Collins is an active, out player, is

if he will have the chance to play. As Collins wrote, "Now I'm a free agent, literally and figuratively. I've reached that enviable state in life in which I can do pretty much what I want. And what I want is to continue to play basketball. I still love the game, and I still have something to offer. My coaches and teammates recognize that. At the same time, I want to be genuine and authentic and truthful."

As of this writing, Celtics coach Doc Rivers has stated that he wants the 7-0 journeyman back on his height-starved team. But Doc is not the Celtics GM. It will certainly be interesting to see if team boss Danny Ainge, a Mormon bishop, will bring Collins back. Here's hoping he does. His team, the League and our society will be better for it.

# NOYZ

Shout out to the usually foolish NCAA folks for having the great idea to host the men's DII and DIII hoop championships in the Final Four city....Meanwhile, conference tournaments and casinos continue to be a match made in hypocrisy heaven.....Love how Kevin Ware handled everything.....We just want to see the Lloyd Daniels movie.....From now on the emoji sad face will simply be known





# PICTURE ME BALLIN'

## UNDER-THE-RADAR PLAYERS WHO DEMAND YOUR ATTENTION

*Heather Butler and Jasmine Newsome, UT Martin (from left, at left):* One of the top mid-major programs in the country, UT Martin has excelled lately largely thanks to its amazing junior backcourt. A 5-5 shooting guard, Butler became the program's all-time scoring leader last season with 2,074 points and counting. The junior set an NCAA record with 79 consecutive games with a three-point field goal and became the program's career leader in three-point field goals. After averaging 22.0 points (second in conference, seventh in nation) and 4.1 assists (sixth in conference), Butler was named to the All-Ohio Valley Conference First-Team for the third consecutive season. Newsome, meanwhile, is also leaving her mark all over the record books. She just became the first UT Martin player in history to win the Ohio Valley Conference

Player of the Year twice and is already the program's all-time assists leader. This past season, Newsome led the OVC in scoring (22.9), assists (5.5) and steals (3). Additionally, she was named OVC Defensive POY for the second time in three years, as well as Tournament MVP.

*Brett Comer, Florida Gulf Coast:* A favorite of the SLAM Ed. who used to be best known for teaming with Austin Rivers in high school, Comer blew up during March Madness. The 6-3 point guard guided FGCU on a magical run that reached the Sweet 16. In their two Tourney wins, Comer, a sophomore, finished with back-to-back double-doubles (12 points, 10 assists; 10 points, 14 assists). On the season, the superb handler and passer averaged 8.0 points, 6.6 assists and multiple highlight-worthy plays a game.—**FRANKLYN CALLE**



## Coach Not D'Antoni

### @CoachNotDAntoni

L.A., baby! <http://www.lakers.com>

retweeter



**Coach Not D'Antoni** @CoachNotDAntoni

29 April

Told you Gasol and Howard couldn't play together. We get down to them and get knocked out of the Playoffs.

Expand



**Coach Not D'Antoni** @CoachNotDAntoni

26 April

How many Playoff series do I have to lose to get a statue outside?

Expand



**Coach Not D'Antoni** @CoachNotDAntoni

22 April

Anyone seen Steve Nash? We could totally use him.

Expand



**Coach Not D'Antoni** @CoachNotDAntoni

18 April

Goudelock? Is he House of Baratheon or Lannister?

Expand



**Coach Not D'Antoni** @CoachNotDAntoni

13 April

(Subtweet: Great, just what Kobe needs, more time to criticize me.)

Expand



**Coach Not D'Antoni** @CoachNotDAntoni

13 April

Get well soon Mamba

Expand



**Coach Not D'Antoni** @CoachNotDAntoni

11 April

Thursday night, TIME FOR SCANDAL!!

Expand

as the "Eric Gordon".....Seattle Bobcats, anyone?.....Keep grinding, Chris Wright!.....Get well soon, Russ. That ish with you and Blake sold pretty well, so we've become even bigger fans of yours. Bet OKC misses JH now, though....In general, it's like we've always said: Respect the game. Everything flows from there.....Marty Blake.....Andy Daugherty.....Bill Shapland.....Greg Willard.....Marty Blake.....Andy Daugherty.....Bill Shapland.....Greg Willard.....









# SLAM DAME MONTH

Taj Gibson over Kris Humphries

April 25, 2013  
United Center, Chicago, IL

"You've gotta be kidding me!" Taj Gibson hurled the copy of *Life & Style* across the room. "I can't believe it!" Gibson had followed Kim and Kris first with eager anticipation, then with a growing horror. This had to stop. But what could he do?

The Brooklyn-born Gibson fell in love with California while

at Stoneridge Prep and chose to attend USC. The weather was one thing, but the celebrities were something else. And the Kim/Kris relationship, which started during Gibson's second year in the L, fascinated him. Humphries was just four months older, and if it could happen to him...

Then everything went wrong. Not with Gibson, of course, with Kardashian. And mostly with Humphries who, from a distance, appeared to be the problem. Why couldn't he just let Kim and Kanye be? Gibson vowed revenge as the Bulls played the Nets in the first round. And then he smiled.—**RUSS BENGTON**





LYNNE MURDOCK/USA VIA GETTY IMAGES




# CHALLENGE MODE

## KEVIN DURANT'S

FIGHTING SPIRIT IMPRESSED US BEFORE HE EVEN ENTERED THE NBA.  
WILL IT BE ENOUGH TO GET THE JAMES HARDEN-LESS  
THUNDER A CHAMPIONSHIP?

BY LANG WHITAKER

 Kevin Durant is sitting in a seat along the baseline at Madison Square Garden. It's a few minutes before noon, a few minutes after the Thunder finished their pre-game walkthrough. Durant is wearing Oklahoma City Thunder-branded sweats, white socks and flip-flops. Just next to his feet is a pair of Nike KD Vs—black, trimmed with blue and orange—which he wore moments earlier during the Thunder's practice, and which he plans to wear tonight against the Knicks. But now: practice over, shoes off.

Durant is holding a stack of papers, glancing at them occasionally, but mostly he's listening to a member of the New York media talk about the renovations impending at Madison Square Garden. When it is explained that a skywalk will be inserted into the Garden, hanging over the court, from basket to basket, allowing fans to have a drink or bite to eat while staring down at the action below, Durant joins the conversation, making several salient points related to patron safety. He is asked if he plans on wearing the shoes at his feet late tonight

in the game at MSG because the shoes are Knicks colors. "Man, these are Thunder colors!" Durant laughs.

A few minutes earlier, Durant spent nine minutes and 28 seconds talking with the media. The key word in that sentence is "with," because, even if he doesn't mean to do this, Durant is really good at making people feel included, as if he's not just talking at you but talking with you. NBA players frequently do this thing where they manage to avoid looking you in the eyes. When I say "you," I mean you, the regular person, the fan. I also mean me, the media member, the interloper who has stumbled my way into their path. I don't know if it's because they are mostly so tall that they're used to seeing over the top or what, but consciously or unconsciously, this seems to be a universal safety mechanism for NBA players to avoid getting trapped too deep into a conversation. Take notice during halftime/post-game interviews of how often you see players stare right over the heads of Sager or Salters. They gaze into nothingness, and perhaps in return they retain some small shred of privacy.



But not Durant. He looks people in the eyes. And in a way, maybe that's how we should have known all along that there was going to be something special about this dude. In the spring of 2007, while we were working on SLAM 110, I wrote the cover story, comparing and contrasting the two players who were at the time being debated as possible number one overall choices: Kevin Durant and Greg Oden.

To try and find where Durant and Oden differed off the court, I asked each of them the same set of 20 questions. For the most part they answered similarly, but Kevin Durant gave me one answer that I've never forgotten. The question I asked was this: Why should an NBA team make you the first overall pick in the NBA Draft?

Greg Oden said, "Because I'm going to be a hard worker. I'm going to come in and I'm going to contribute. I'm going to play my game and I'm not going to try to take over and mess up the atmosphere. I'm going to be a good person, I'll do my part, work hard and do what's best for my team to win."

This was a perfectly fine and respectable answer. Until Kevin Durant looked me in the eyes and answered the same question in a completely different way. "I think I have a winning mentality," Durant said. "Even though I'm young, I can bring leadership to an organization. I'm just cold-blooded. I really don't care. Whoever's in front of me, I'm going to do my best to destroy them. Younger people might back down sometimes, but I think I'm a tough player and I don't back down from anything—I accept challenges. I know it's going to be hard, but everything you have to face is hard. I'll be young, and I'm sure people will write me off and say I'm too small or not ready, but I've been going through that my whole life."

As those words came out of Durant's mouth, they might as well have been spoken in blinking neon, the way they jumped out at me. They weren't aggressive, they were just...assured. I couldn't shake them. Still haven't. And so on July 2, 2007, a week after Oden was selected first overall, I wrote this on [SLAMonline.com](http://SLAMonline.com):

*If I had the first pick in the Draft, I'd take...Kevin Durant. Look, both of these guys are going to be awesome NBA players—that's basically*

*a given. But if I had the first pick, I'd want the guy who's going to be a legend, or at least give everything he has while trying to become a legend. I'm not saying Greg won't be a legend, but I can't get this one quote from Kevin out of my head: "I'm just cold-blooded. I really don't care. Whoever's in front of me, I'm going to do my best to destroy them." He didn't sound arrogant when he said it, he just kind of threw it out there casually, but you could tell he meant it. And that's the mindset I'd want to build my franchise around.*

I still think if injuries hadn't played a part, Oden would have been a tremendous NBA player, but all that stuff Durant said? It actually came true. Not even six years later, not even 25 years old, and Durant is already pretty much universally recognized as not only one of the best players in the NBA today, with the potential to be one of the greatest of all time. In six seasons, he's won three scoring titles, one Gold medal, is about to be named First-Team All-NBA for the fourth time and made his first NBA Finals appearance a year ago.

For me, the most impressive thing about Durant and the Thunder has been the way they adjust and learn on the fly. It was just four years ago that they finished 26 games under .500. The next year they made the Playoffs and lost in the first round. The next year they won in the first round and lost in the Western Conference Finals. The next year they won in the Western Conference Finals and lost in the NBA Finals. That was last year. What happens now?

"We're a different team," Durant says. "We've just got to learn from our past experiences and continue to keep getting better at the small things, detail things: setting screens, setting our man up on plays, running all our plays hard, getting in the stance on the defensive end. I think those are the small things that separate good teams from great teams. If we do those, we'll be fine."

The big difference, of course, is that the Thunder will have to survive and advance without James Harden, their long-time third option. OKC's big three became a big two—and then, as we were going to press and learned that Russell Westbrook was lost for the season—a big one. Still, while Harden has shined in Houston, Durant says losing

"WITH JAMES LAST YEAR, WE WERE  
A 2 SEED, BUT WE HAPPENED TO  
HAVE A GOOD RUN IN THE PLAYOFFS.  
SO I WOULDN'T SAY THAT WE'RE  
HURTING WITHOUT HIM."







him hasn't clouded their outlook.

"We're confident. Of course, people are gonna say we lost James Harden. The way he's playing now, of course they're going to say we're not going to be as good, since he's an All-Star, averaging 26 a game. But if he was still here, he'd still be around 18, 17 points a game. So it's kind of unfair for people to say that about how James would play with us, because

he has his own team; he doesn't have me and Russell on his team controlling the ball. A player like that is going to flourish. With us he would have been the same type of player he was last year."

Does such a big trade mean the Finals are a referendum on the deal?

"Nah. I don't think so. We're still a good team. If that was the case we wouldn't have this good of a record, we wouldn't be fighting for a No. 1 seed. With James last year, we had the same record, we were a 2 seed, but we happened to have a good run in the Playoffs. So I wouldn't say that we're hurting without James. Of course he's having a great season, but any team would love to have him."

Serving as OKC's undeniable leader throughout a 60-22 regular season, KD shot 51 percent from the field, 42 percent from the three-point line and 91 percent from the free-throw line. The 50/40/90 club is elite enough, but KD came within a few late-season Carmelo Anthony buckets of being the first shooter of that caliber to lead the League in scoring while doing it.

All of which is why it's both charming and alarming to hear Durant's response when I asked him about the season he's had.

"I could be a lot better," he says, showing genuine disapproval on his face. "I'm not pleased with the way I'm playing at all."

I want to yell at him: ARE YOU SERIOUS? Instead I say, "Well, that

50/40/90 thing is pretty impressive."

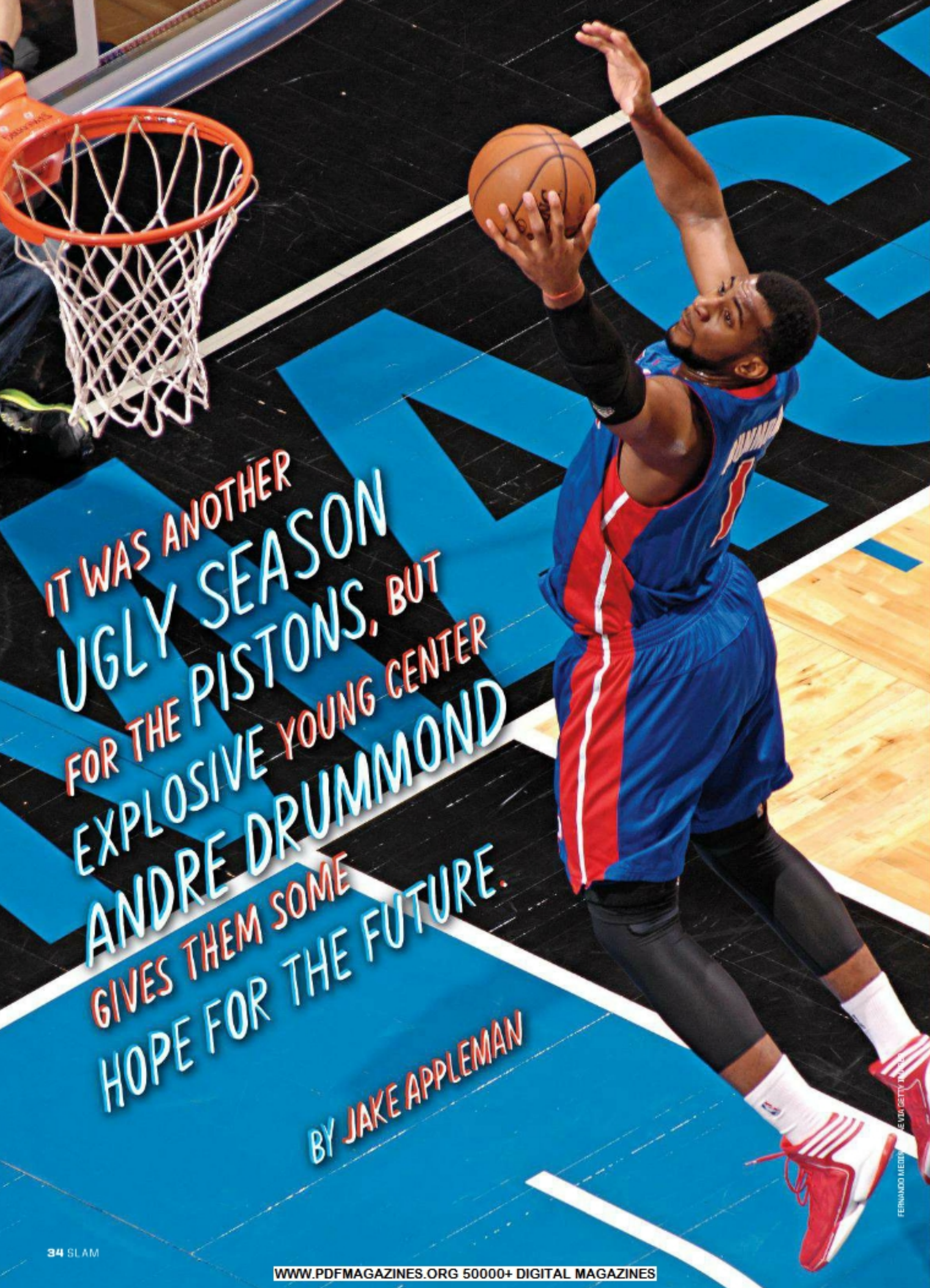
"Yeah, but I could be a lot better," Durant responds. He is not kidding. "I've been missing some shots that I feel like I normally hit. I'm not pleased with the way I'm playing. Well, I wouldn't say I'm not pleased. The way I'm shooting the ball, it could be better. I think I'm rebounding the ball pretty well, I'm passing pretty well, I'm playing defense, but I could be a lot better. I want to shoot the ball a lot better in these next upcoming games. Hopefully I do so. I've just got to keep believing in myself, and have faith in hard work. And hopefully I start to make them."

He's already proven that hard work pays off—as a rookie, he shot 29 percent on threes. But his statement to me came after two games in which Durant had shot 40 and 41 percent from the floor. (After saying he wanted to shoot better in his upcoming games, he shot 45, 50, 38, 54, 54 and 53 percent, respectively, in his next six games.)

Listen to Kevin Durant talk about Kevin Durant, and you might think you're listening to high school junior varsity player sucking up to the coach. This is no breaking news, but at this point Kevin Durant is so self-effacing, he's made humility seem macho. Still, he's proudly a mother's boy—he recently showed his mother how to use FaceTime, increasing their already strong connection. Just minutes after he posted 34, 8 and 6 on the Knicks in the World's Most Famous Arena, Durant posted a photo on Instagram that became one of the service's trending pictures. What did he call "the highlight of my night"? Getting to meet a New York-based preacher.

As the Thunder head out of the arena, Durant stands, rising a bit above his listed height of 6-9 and ambles toward the freight elevator. As much as he stood out a few minutes earlier, standing with his teammates, he easily blends in, a tall guy lost in a forest of tall guys. He cracks a joke and Russell Westbrook smiles, and then everyone slips on oversized headphones and disappears into wordless worlds of their own making. 🎧





IT WAS ANOTHER  
UGLY SEASON  
FOR THE PISTONS, BUT  
EXPLOSIVE YOUNG CENTER  
ANDRE DRUMMOND  
GIVES THEM SOME  
HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.  
BY JAKE APPLEMAN



# The Big Piece

**T**he first good performance of Andre Drummond's career as an NBA starter came in his second try, against the Chicago Bulls on Easter Saturday in the United Center, an arena barely older than the 19-year-old Drummond. The Bulls hadn't lost to the Pistons since December 23, 2008 and in each prior attempt this season, the Bulls had rallied from a 17-point deficit. It was also the Bulls' first home game since breaking the Heat's epic 27-game winning streak.

It didn't look good for the Lottery-bound stragglers, fighting through yet another bleak season but the Pistons took it to the Bulls and built a sizable lead. Drummond scored his first basket on a tip-in and used his massive reach to beat Carlos Boozer to a rebound that he had no business corraling. He didn't convert the three-point play, but still put the Pistons up 18-5 and checked out with 7 rebounds in 7:17 of game action.

Predictably, the Bulls clawed their way back into the game and the Pistons couldn't even run with their most talented lineup down the stretch. Charlie Villanueva, in the game ostensibly for Drummond, missed the game-tying three. Jose Calderon was also in the game even though he had a tendon problem in his arm, making it almost impossible for him to summon the strength to shoot a three-pointer.

Strange that Drummond, boasting raw power and game-altering athleticism, would be glued to the bench. But coming off of a back injury and too big a part of the Pistons' future, Drummond is seen as an asset to be preserved.

"We're still going to be cautious of his minutes," then-Pistons coach Lawrence Frank said before the game, mere minutes after Kevin Ware broke his leg in front of what felt like the whole country.

Frank soon shifted into a hybrid coach-scout speak in assessing Drummond's good qualities.

"He doesn't even know how strong he is. He's a strong, strong guy. But his quickness, his feet, his hands, his ability to finish at the rim..."

Frank also said Drummond needs to, "stay within [his] strength zone,"—i.e. play to his strengths while developing his weaknesses.

"It's a little bit tough for me, starting a game and then coming out in different times when I'm not really expecting it, so it kind of throws me off a little bit," Drummond admits, his soft voice the opposite of his jarring vertical leap. "But just being out there on the floor, it still feels great that I'm actually back instead of watching the game, so I can't complain about the minute restriction at all."

With such a close result, it was hard for Frank to hide how hard it is to win without Drummond.



"It's almost like, I gotta beg [Pistons Trainer Arnie Kander]," Frank continued. "But at the end of the day, it's: We're not going to sacrifice Dre's long-term growth for short term."

Drummond's ability to blossom when paired with Greg Monroe in the frontcourt is one—and perhaps the only—reason for Pistons' brass to feel confident moving forward.

"He sees different things that I probably don't see and I see different things that he doesn't see," Drummond says of playing with Monroe.

Monroe's ability to score in myriad ways paired with Drummond's dominance on the glass has Pistons fans understandably excited. Predictably, Frank turned big-picture philosophical while also tempering expectations for the twin towers tandem.

"One's 19, the other's 22," the coach said. "Sometimes what we do is we're very, very quick to rush to judgment on young guys. 'Well it doesn't work.' It was four games. 'Oh it does work! It's great! These guys are better than, you know, Sampson and Olajuwon!' It's just going to take time."

How good those things become may not depend on the Drummond/Monroe pairing, but the other pieces built around them. The Pistons nosedived after signing Ben Gordon and Villanueva to lucrative contracts in 2009. A team with a defensive identity quickly became an ill-fitting mishmash of gunners and guys on the decline. Four losing seasons followed the team's last Playoff appearance, the loud reverberations of DEE-TROIT BAS-KET-BALL fading into a faint echo in front of smaller and smaller crowds in Auburn Hills. A post All-Star break malaise has played a hand in defining each season since 2008.

Gordon was traded to the Bobcats after last season and Villanueva's deal will expire after the summer, but the Pistons have to move wisely. Continuing to build through the Draft while preaching patience—playing the role of the poker player slowly accumulating chips—would theoretically help in making a bigger splash down the line. Almost half of the Pistons' 2013 salary commitments will be gone this summer when money owed to Rip Hamilton evaporates and Jose Calderon, Will Bynum, Corey Maggette and Jason Maxiell hit free agency, leaving the Pistons with a young core of Drummond, Monroe, Brandon Knight, Jonas Jerebko and Kyle Singler to build around.

There will also be a new coach. For now, Pistons fans have to dream on Drummond, the most tantalizing of that nucleus whose numbers (14 points and 14 rebounds per 36 minutes) presage great things. "My rookie year has been solid," he says. "Went down with the injury, so...it's been a great learning experience for me and I thought I got better each and every game."

Regarding a summer ripe for development, Drummond says: "I could

work on my back-to-the-basket game, but mostly—I mean, things I do on the floor, you can't teach. I play hard. I play hard and I grab rebounds. What I'm really working on this summer is my free throws. Really, just work on my free throws and make sure I'm in condition when I come back."

The free throws are a concern. Drummond air-balled a crucial pair at the stripe against the Bulls and shot just 36 percent for the season as if he was wearing Bo Outlaw beer goggles even though he would need a fake ID to drink.

I remember sitting courtside at the XL Center in Hartford last year before a Connecticut game, scouts and front office types salivating over Drummond as he displayed the layup line explosiveness reminiscent of

a young Amar'e Stoudemire. He didn't play particularly well that afternoon, getting outplayed inside by Notre Dame big men who will never sniff the League. It was hard not to look at the sleepy beast cynically. Yet the kid whose Draft stock fell has made a good first NBA impression, reminding many in the

scouting business why they shouldn't always jump to quick conclusions.

Oh, the Pistons finally beat the Bulls seven days after the close call on Easter. Drummond had a quiet night (3 points, 10 rebounds), but the result was a step in the right direction, and in his next game his minutes finally went up. Drummond went for 29 and 11 in Cleveland. Next season will come and the big man will check in, continuing—literally and figuratively—to move forward. 🏀

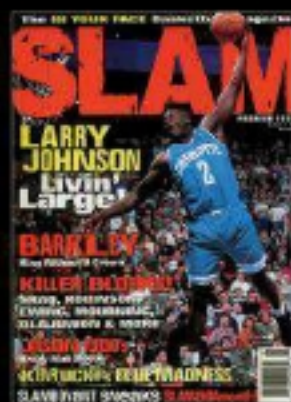
**"THE THINGS I DO ON THE FLOOR, YOU CAN'T TEACH. I PLAY HARD. I PLAY HARD AND I GRAB REBOUNDS."**



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# The Magazine That Changed The Game...



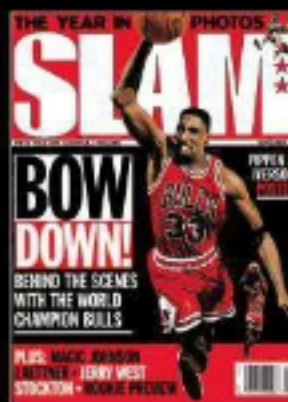
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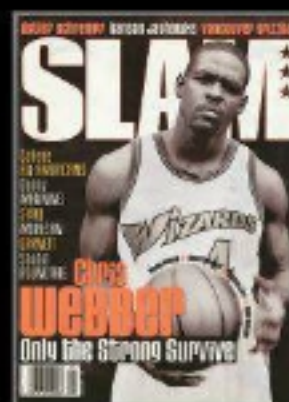
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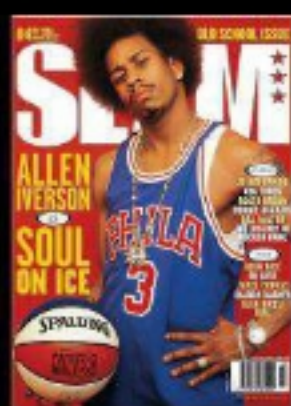
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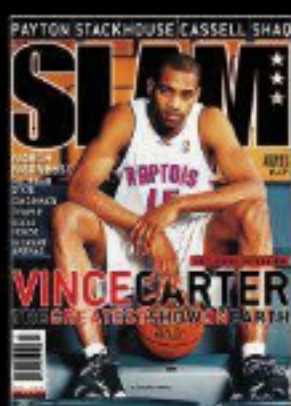
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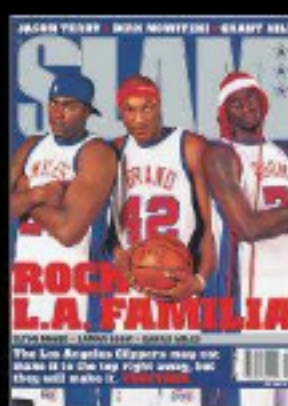
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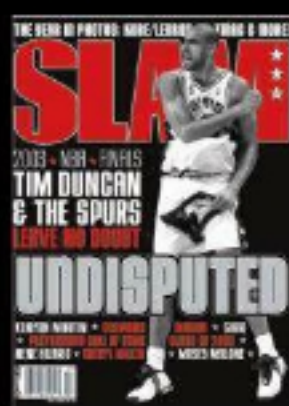
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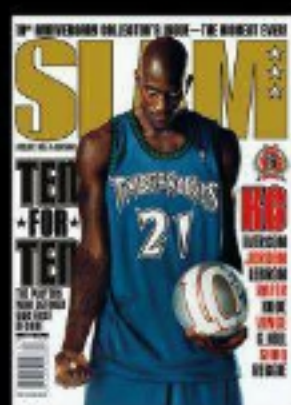
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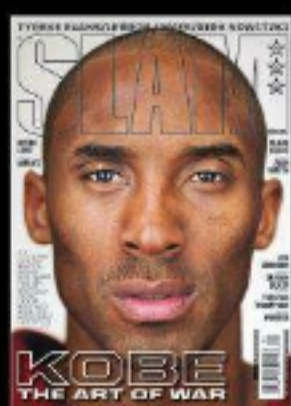
2007



2008



2009



2010



2011



2012



2013

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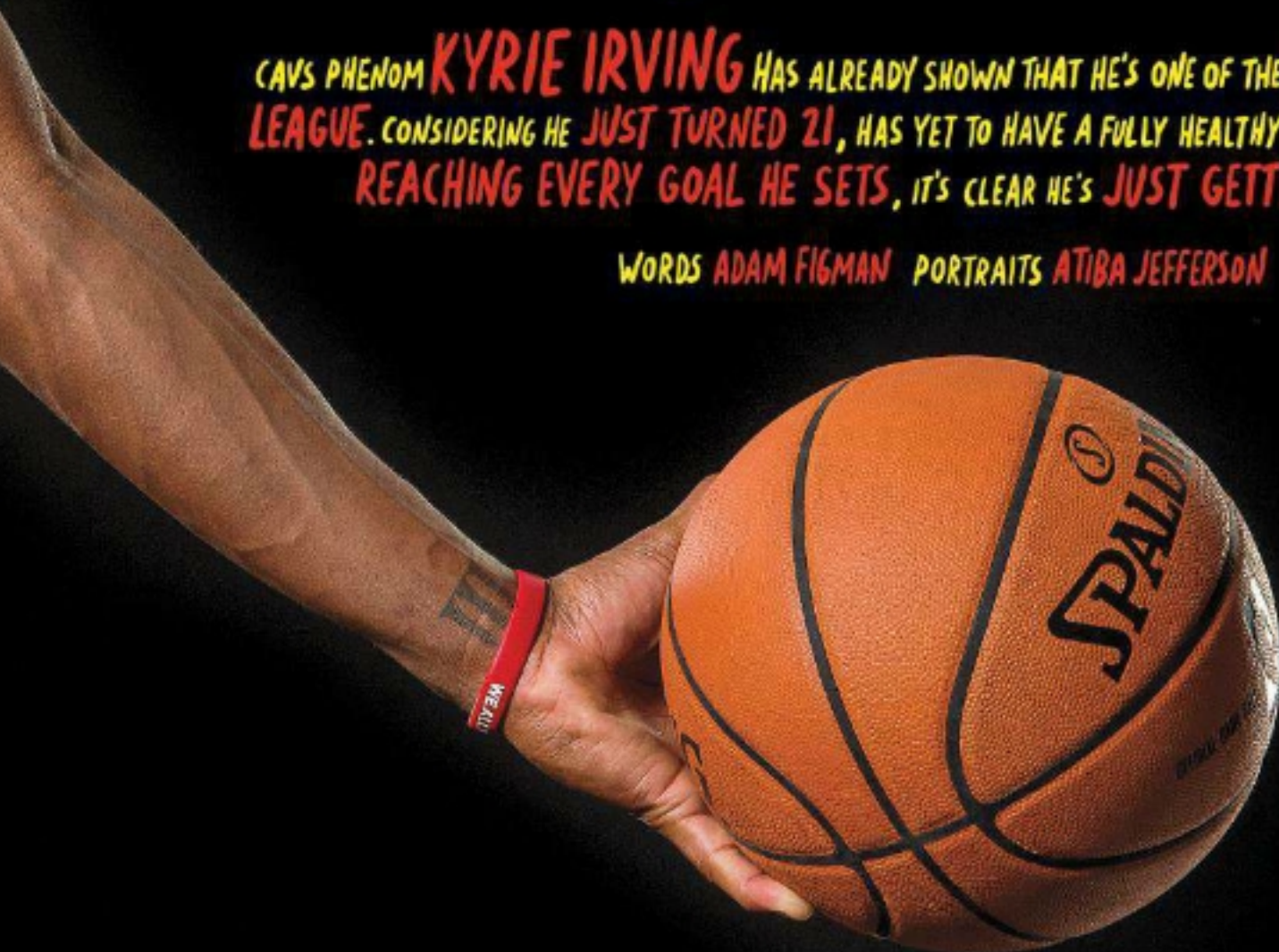




# The KYRIE IRVING Show

CAVS PHENOM **KYRIE IRVING** HAS ALREADY SHOWN THAT HE'S ONE OF THE **BEST GUARDS IN THE LEAGUE**. CONSIDERING HE **JUST TURNED 21**, HAS YET TO HAVE A FULLY HEALTHY SEASON AND IS KNOWN FOR **REACHING EVERY GOAL HE SETS**, IT'S CLEAR HE'S **JUST GETTING STARTED**.

WORDS **ADAM FIGMAN** PORTRAITS **ATIBA JEFFERSON**





A

t some point during the '13-14 NBA season, Kyrie Irving will be matched up one-on-one with a defender about 25 feet from the hoop. The defender will lean in and lock down—he's surely seen footage of Irving blowing past dozens of guards and forwards who tried and failed to stay in front of him over the past few years—not wanting to be another addition to an ever-growing highlight reel. Irving will stutter-step quickly to the left, then swivel his body to the right as if he intends to then dart to the hoop. The defender may be thrown off-balance, but he'll catch up to the paused Irving, satisfied that he's thus far managed to keep pace with his fast-footed opponent. But just before that poor sap fully regains his composure, the Cavs point guard will lunge hard to the right, and the defender, still mid-recovery, will push all of his momentum in that direction in an attempt to somehow remain between the ballhandler and the basket. Irving will then spin fluently to the left, fulfilling what—unbeknownst to his now-defeated opponent—was to be his endgame all along.

And then he'll be wide open.

"How they gonna stop this?" Irving asks, miming the play step by step while destroying the imaginary defender in his path. We're in a high-ceilinged all-white room in Carousel Studios, located in sunny Miami's Buena Vista neighborhood, a few minutes before he'll pose for the photos that grace this magazine's pages. Our cover star is clad in a Cavs gold jersey, matching shorts and a pair of bright yellow Nike Hyperdunks with his KI emblem stitched on to the tongue. And, you know, the kid makes a good point. It's pretty freakin' difficult to envision trying to keep up with that elaborate set of moves without spiraling uncontrollably off course.

It's mid-April, just a few days removed from Irving's second year, though he'd later tell me this season felt more like his rookie campaign. His actual first season immediately followed a lockout, and it was filled with all of the requisite post-lockout weirdness, a handful of games

stacked on top of each other with little opportunity to take a breather and figure out what the hell this whole NBA thing is actually about. He did win the Rookie of the Year award in '11-12, but what's taken place in the time since has put him on the map in a whole new way.

There was the game last December against the Lakers, in which he went back and forth with a ruthless Kobe Bryant, eventually finishing with 28 points, 11 dimes and a huge win. And one against the Knicks days later, in which he dropped a career-high 41 in front of a raucous MSG crowd. And one in late January against Toronto, in which he drained a game-winning 28-footer in the tilt's closing seconds.

And then there was All-Star Weekend, which rapidly evolved into the Kyrie Irving Show. First he shook Brandon Knight out of his shoes at the Rookie-Sophomore Game; then he out-shot a set of sharpshooters in the Three-Point Shootout; then he played major minutes in the All-Star Game, scoring 15 points and dishing 4 assists.

All in all, a strong, if ultimately unsatisfactory—the Cavs finished 24-58, 13th in the Eastern Conference—sophomore campaign. "It was a big learning experience for me," Irving says. "I had to have a fast learning curve, the fastest I've ever had, just being the youngest player on the team and being the leader. I had a target on my back basically all season. I earned almost everybody's respect in the League, and became one of the best point guards and best players in the League."

How'd he earn that respect? The crazy All-Star Weekend helped, as did the occasional scoring outbursts, the incredibly popular Uncle Drew Pepsi spots and the countless highlights. But it was also his astounding ability to step up in the clutch—he scored 145 points in what the NBA considers "crunch time" (five minutes or less remaining, a game within 5 points), second to only Kevin Durant and Kobe Bryant, who played 15 and 10 more minutes in that situation, respectively—that drew Kyrie praise from every corner of the NBA media sphere.

"It's instincts, honestly," he says. "At the end of the game, I live for

**"I HAD TO HAVE THE FASTEST  
LEARNING CURVE I'VE EVER HAD, JUST  
BEING THE YOUNGEST PLAYER ON THE  
TEAM AND BEING THE LEADER."**

UN SPORTS.











those moments, because those moments I've practiced so many times by myself. At the end of the game, I feel like I've already been there."

It hasn't taken long for Kyrie to start to plan for what comes next. He was already writing down his goals—something he's done since he was a little kid, scribbling on the wall of his closet (and then in a black-and-white notebook, and now in his iPhone)—for next season before last one even ended. He'll be spending the majority of his offseason with his fam in New Jersey, breaking only to vacation in Miami (where his girlfriend lives) and occasionally to jet to North Carolina to workout with both old and new Duke buddies.

"He's gotta get stronger, like a lot of our young guys do—working in the weight room and so on and so forth in the offseason," says Cavs GM Chris Grant. "But he'll continue to work. We're looking forward to him coming back physically stronger and continuing to grow to another level with the same amount of confidence he did from his first year to his second year."

That sounds like a safe bet. "He's not too proud to be forced to make mistakes," says Micah Lancaster, a trainer who has worked out Kyrie in the past. Lancaster once pelted a dodgeball at the 6-3 guard during a drill, forcing him to maintain his dribble in order to improve his ballhandling. "I thought I could get him, but he just wasn't fazed. When guys work as hard as he does, it just tells you that there's still so much more room for them to grow."

An hour or so after our cover shoot, Kyrie and I sit at the bar of a pizza joint a few blocks from the studio, waiting for an open table. He chews on an appetizer of meatballs while the Nuggets and Warriors open their series on the restaurant's only TV. We begin speaking about what's to come, and I can't help but ask Kyrie what's featured on that list of goals for next season. "I keep those to myself," he says, cracking a half-smile. "Obviously I want to get a lot more wins, and become a better leader and be the leader that we need and just make the Playoffs. That's on the surface of the goals, obviously."

Ever since his NBA career began, he's laid out those goals each year with

**"WE'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO HIM COMING BACK PHYSICALLY STRONGER AND CONTINUING TO GROW TO ANOTHER LEVEL WITH THE SAME AMOUNT OF CONFIDENCE HE DID FROM HIS FIRST YEAR TO HIS SECOND YEAR."**

**-GRANT**

head coach Byron Scott, who was fired one day after '12-13 came to a close.

Reports of a rift between Irving and Scott had been circulating—understandable, considering Irving essentially pleaded the Fifth when asked about Scott's future with the Cavs toward the end of the season, not exactly a ringing endorsement—but those words (or lack thereof) probably came with an understanding that there was no way Scott would actually get booted out of town. Immediately following the firing, Irving told reporters he was "trying to get over the loss of his basketball father" and that he felt like "a piece of him is missing."

"That was my guy," he says now. We've moved over to a table at the pizza spot with his agent and one of Kyrie's close friends, and while he speaks, an NBA Playoffs commercial runs on the muted TV overhead, the stars of the '13 postseason appearing on screen one after the next. I ask if he'd like some kind of say in who Scott's successor will be. "It's a business. That's a front-office decision. Right now, I'm just kind of dealing with the loss of Coach Scott. When that time arises, and we're on the brink of hiring a new coach, I'll have answers, but right now I don't have an answer for that."

The two spoke on the phone shortly after the firing, though Irving had little to offer the conversation. "He told me to stay the course," Kyrie says. "That's all he needed to say."

It may have come as a surprise to Irving, but it's no shock the Cavs front office wasn't pleased with how things unfolded this year. For one, there was little encouraging team improvement as the season wound down—the group ended '12-13 losing 16 of 18. They also ranked dead last in the League in opponents' field-goal percentage at 47.6 percent, displaying little hope on the defensive end. And Irving ended on a frustrating note as well; in the last possession of the last contest of the season, with the chance for yet another game-winner, he was stripped by Miami guard Norris Cole and didn't even get a shot attempt up.

Irving tweaked the inside of his heel during the play, and ran right back to



the locker room to get it checked out, electing not to return for a fan appreciation event that was set for post-game. He'd later apologize on Twitter. "I was wrong on my end," Irving says. "If we had more games I could've tried to bring back that [fan appreciation], you know? It's more of an emotional time for me losing the game, and it being against the Miami Heat. It was a little bit of an embarrassment, but you learn from stuff like that."

"My duty is to go out and compete for the city of Cleveland," he continues. His relationship with the second biggest city in Ohio is a pretty positive one—it wasn't long ago he was stuck being branded The Next LeBron, but now, as fans begin to clamor for the highly unlikely return of LeBron in 2014, they've started to let Kyrie be Kyrie. "He's under a microscope because of what he means to the franchise," says Mark "Munch" Bishop, who co-hosts a Cleveland-based morning show on ESPN radio. Munch notes that he used to go easy on LeBron, hoping to do his part in helping the Cavs retain the superstar. Having learned his lesson, he now speaks his mind. "I am much tougher on Kyrie than I was on LeBron. If they're gonna leave, they're gonna leave—there's nothing you can do."

Ultimately, while Irving hopes the city of Cleveland stands behind him as he adapts to the NBA, it's his real family that means the most to him—the Australian-born, Jersey-raised Irving lost his mother at age 4 and grew up with a single parent and two sisters. He and his pops remain inseparably close. "We talk after every game," says his father, Drederick Irving. "Every night after every game we talk about a different element of the game. It's always something in the department of growing. The game is so fast at the next level—it's a perpetual growing process for him because of the fast pace of the game."

Back at the pizza place, I ask Irving if he wants to one day have kids of his own. "Yeah," he says, though he jokes about the world not being ready for Kyrie Irving Jr just yet. He then makes a decent point: If he does name his son Kyrie Irving Jr, that kid will be the only person on the planet who shares his name with him. "Technically, I am the only Kyrie Irving in the world. The whole world. You gotta think about it: When you think about your name, think how many have your last name, and how many people have your first name. What's the likely chance of somebody having the combination of your full name? I'm the only one!"

Weird, but confirmed as best we can: There really is only one Kyrie Irving. Pretty fitting, all things considered.

A few days after I get up with Kyrie in Miami, we reconnect in Orlando, where he has a meeting with a company he's signed on to endorse. After touring the company's facilities and learning the ins and outs of the organization, Kyrie reclines in the lobby of the building chatting up some of his hosts. He looks relaxed, wearing a Nike t-shirt, loose black basketball shorts and a pair of black/white Nike P-Rod 5s that he snatched from the SLAM photo shoot earlier in the week.

I'm sitting on a couch on the other side of the lobby, shooting the breeze with the company's communications director. During a lull in our conversation, I pull out my phone and start scrolling through my Twitter timeline when a tweet from Yahoo! Sports' Adrian Wojnarowski comes across my feed:

"Cavaliers, Mike Brown are constructing a five-year contract, league source tells Y! The final year on deal would include a buyout provision."

Oh shit!

So, what now? Do I run and tell Kyrie the news, stick my tape recorder in front of his face and get a quick reaction quote? That's what any Intro to Journalism professor would want me to do, right? But...is he going to be happy about this?

Brown is a solid enough coach, but just days ago Kyrie could barely speak about the end of the Byron Scott Era, and it's hard to imagine him actively excited for someone to take his place just yet. And what if he hates the move? It certainly doesn't seem to have been made in conjunction with the franchise's best player whatsoever. (Days later, I'd ask Grant if Irving factored into the hiring. He was diplomatic: "For us, it was the best decision for our team. We want to build a team that is winning and has long-term success. Certainly we think about our players, but overall it's the best decision for the entire group.")

Plus, he looks so peaceful, cheerfully joking around in this beautiful, sun-drenched setting after a nice, productive day. This news is going to alter his short- and possibly long-term future. Do I really want to be the messenger here?

No more than a couple seconds pass when, still oblivious to the latest headline, he stands up and shakes the hands of the group of guys who guided him around for the past few hours. He then sends a nod and a goodbye wave in my direction, and without even a peek at his assuredly message-filled iPhone, the one and only Kyrie Irving walks toward the exit, pushes open the glass door and disappears into the Florida sun. ☀











STORIES OF  
NBA PLAYERS  
OVERCOMING LONG  
ODDS TO MAKE IT BIG IN THE  
LEAGUE ARE NOT NEW,  
BUT NONE OF THEM READ QUITE  
LIKE THE STORY OF

# GREIVIS VASQUEZ.

BY TZVI TWERSKY

# STARTED FROM BOTTOM



When Greivis Vasquez emerged out of Washington, DC-area's Reagan National Airport on September 25, 2004, the teenage native of Caracas, Venezuela, did not know what sort of greeting to expect. He knew why he had left his homeland on his mother's birthday: to finish high school at basketball powerhouse Montrose Christian in Rockville, MD. He knew how hard that was to make happen; initially, his request for an I-20 visa, which allows foreign students to study in the US, was declined. But he had not envisioned the actual moment of his arrival. Nor could he have.

"The first thing I said to him," says David Adkins, "was, 'You're not effing 6-8!'" Now a member of the Lady Terps' staff at the University of Maryland, Adkins was then an assistant under Montrose's head coach Stu Vetter. He was also the man responsible for handling Vasquez' recruitment—a DI coach made the initial recommendation, and Masai Ujiri, a vaunted scout and the current GM of the Denver Nuggets, seconded it—and on that day, in charge of picking the smaller-than-advertised guard up.

The duo proceeded to laugh, hesitantly and harmoniously, for very different reasons. Adkins, a long-time coach who had dealt with international players before, assumed the player stepping off the tarmac wouldn't be a 6-8 forward, even if his scouting report said so. As for Vasquez, he laughed out of a nervousness that only a stranger in a strange land for the first time could feel. He laughed because, well, that was really the only way for the two to communicate.

"He thought I was going to be 6-8, and I was 6-3 and skinnier than I am now," Vasquez says. "And I couldn't understand anything else."

After they loaded up Adkins' late model white Range Rover, where they were joined by a Spanish-speaking woman who worked at Montrose and rode along to help translate, they shifted into gear and embarked on Vasquez's new life. The first stop would serve the wide-eyed Vasquez—who barely spoke any English—a small taste of Americana, and would reassure Adkins, who spoke even less Spanish, that, no matter his size, Montrose had recruited the right guy.

"I would've taken him anywhere, but he wanted to go to McDonald's," Adkins remembers, fondly. "This is mid-afternoon, and we sit down to eat. He took a bite, maybe two, then he looks at me and says, 'When do we train?' I'm like, 'OK.' We usually give a guy a day to settle in before we see what he has, but we went right to the gym and worked out and he's been working out ever since."

When he confirms Adkins' recollection of that day, it's March 20, 2013, nearly nine years after he first touched down in DC, and Vasquez, now a full-grown 6-6 point guard who commands the English language like he does his play on the court, couldn't be further from the Golden Arches. Dressed in a loud, light-colored sports coat and dark skinny tie that brings a Kobe Bryant ensemble to mind, the 26-year-old is folded into a booth at Root, an opulent restaurant with a menu that could confuse a fifth-generation American, in New Orleans' Warehouse District. His toddler, Greivis Jr, who attends nearly every Hornets home game, runs around the otherwise adults-only establishment in childish delight. At the table in front of Vasquez sits an intermezzo sorbet, to cleanse his palate, and a medium-well steak is on the way, complete with housemade ketchup and strawberry mustard.

Less than an hour before sitting down for this gourmet dinner, Vasquez was on the court at New Orleans Arena when a flu-ish Anthony Davis tipped in a walk-off winner against the Boston Celtics. The 87-86 W ticked the Hornets record up to a meager 23-46, but it brought a fired-up Tom Benson, the owner of the Hornets and NFL Saints, down to the locker room for an impromptu celebratory speech. Benson, who purchased the team from the NBA last year, exuberantly expressed excitement about what he perceives as the now-Pelicans bright future. While Vasquez isn't especially pleased with his performance—13 points, 7 rebounds, 6 assists, as compared to his season averages of 14.1, 4.4 and 9.2—he considers himself an integral part of Benson's long-term plans in New Orleans, and "loves" the owner's passion.

The game is behind Greivis now though, at least until he cues up a tape of it tomorrow. At the moment, as the thimble-thin Vasquez slowly operates on his steak, he's content to regale a guest with tales of a childhood spent on the often unfriendly and unsafe streets of Caracas; tales of a childhood that would shock most of his teammates; tales of a childhood that cultivated a man and culminated in the fulfillment of that man's dreams.

Up until 2010, Venezuela had produced two NBA players, Oscar Torres, who played a total of 82 games over the span of two seasons in the early Aughts, and Carl Herrera, who won two NBA titles with the Houston Rockets in the '90s. Otherwise, baseball was and is the pastime. When he was about 7, Greivis—whose unique first

name is a mashup of Gregario, his father's name, and Ivis, his mother's—did his national duty and joined a local baseball league. But by the time he was 9, the antsy centerfielder realized he was ready to try another, faster-paced sport.

"When you play little league, ain't nobody hitting it in centerfield," says Vasquez, "so I was always bored."

At the same time, whether by luck or by some prescient fatherly instinct, Gregario had begun taking Greivis to see *Cocodrilos de Caracas*, the local professional basketball team, play. The younger Vasquez was immediately smitten by the up-and-down, non-stop nature of the action. Before going home after games, while his father would unwind with homies, Greivis would reenact what he had just seen take place on the hardwood. By the time he was 11, his dad signed him up for a local team, and his mom, who was by then separated from his father, let him put up a miniature basket on the back of his door in their two-room apartment.

"See how I have a little space between my two teeth up front?" points out Vasquez. "I used to play one-on-one in the basket in my room with my older brother. One time he was going to take a shower, and he told me not to play there by myself. But I did, and I thought I was Michael Jordan and went up for a dunk and the net got mixed up with my teeth. I lost a permanent tooth—since then my parents spent so much money taking me to the dentist [laughs]."

Vasquez didn't really have a special knack for basketball, but at 13 years old, he didn't care. He wasn't playing with the hopes of becoming a pro; he was playing, often until 2 a.m. or his dad got mad, out of pure love of the game.

Says Monty Williams, the Hornets' head coach, "Most of the guys from overseas, especially South Americans, they have that. I was with Manu Ginobili in San Antonio and just watching him, he and Greivis have some of the same mannerisms when it comes to the game. Those guys will play any time, anywhere—they just like playing basketball. In the rec center, on the weekends, streetball—they'll just go play."

The truth is, if at any point Vasquez didn't feel a certain way about basketball, he would've given it up. After all, it would've made his childhood easier.

"Basketball was only in the hood," says Vasquez. Consider for a second that "the hood" in Caracas, a city where more than 100 police officers alone were killed in 2012, can make the streets of inner-city Chicago look like an idyllic suburb. "I would tell my mom I was playing at this arena where the pro team used to play, in order for her to let me play, and I would go to the hood, *Pinto Salinas*, to play against the best players out there."

Vasquez wasn't just at risk while he was in a variety of impoverished neighborhoods



working on his game. On his way to a 6 p.m. practice every day—the route required him to walk 12 blocks to the nearest Metro station where he would then ride a bus—he had to traverse a minefield of muggers and murderers to merely get to the gym. As Vasquez, a devout Christian, tells it, the fact that he never met any real harm is thanks to an act of Divine providence—and a whole lot of sprinting.

"At nighttime, when I would be going from the Metro station to my house, I'd be running," says Vasquez. "I never walked anywhere. I used to run all those blocks and get home sweaty. A couple times I was on the bus when a thief came on with a gun and stole stuff, cell phones, money. But I was a young kid, so I never had anything."

Not content with offering up generalizations of the distances he'd go for basketball, Vasquez provides another example. When Greivis was a teenager, he went to school in

the San Martín section of Caracas, which is located right down the way from Guarataro, one of the roughest areas in the tougher-than-teflon city. One day, some of his friends who lived there challenged him to stay and play. When Vasquez hesitated, they started questioning his manhood.

"I was afraid—there were people with guns out watching us play—but I'll play anywhere," says Vasquez. "Once I stepped on that court, they said, 'Who is that white boy? He can play!' I gained respect in that hood, not only for coming to play but playing well."

Fear, or lack thereof, served Vasquez well when he came to America. It's why he felt comfortable playing in any environment while making a name for himself at Montrose.

"That Caracas toughness was part of why he never felt entitled," says Adkins, who worked diligently with the teenager he called "Flashy Freddy" on fixing his jumper and

knowledge of the fundamentals in their time together at Montrose. "He would fight [in drills] 'til he couldn't breathe. His work ethic was insatiable. And then he had the flair."

"He has no fear," says Stu Vetter. During Vasquez' two-year stay at Montrose, which ultimately culminated in a full scholarship to Maryland, Vetter developed a father-son relationship with him. To this day, Vetter keeps a room for Vasquez in his house. "He doesn't fear anyone, and he accepts challenges. And he'll work as hard as he wants to to get to where he wants to be."

Even though Montrose boasts a great basketball program, it's not Maryland and it's not in the ACC. But the leap in nightly competition for the lightly recruited guard only helped serve as a reminder of how far he'd already come. "Why wasn't I afraid in college?" asks Vasquez, who made Second-Team All-American as a senior. "I've seen mufuckers getting killed, people stealing stuff back home. That's tough. Seeing that, it ain't nothing playing at Duke."

It's that borderline irreverent attitude when it comes to the game—what some in Nola describe as a cocky humbleness—that helped Vasquez, as Vetter terms it, "bring energy for four years that has not been duplicated. It's also that attitude that, after spending most of his rookie year on the pine after being drafted 28th overall by the Memphis Grizzlies in the '10 Draft, allowed Vasquez to slide seamlessly into Playoff action against the San Antonio Spurs and Oklahoma City Thunder.

"I watched him in the Playoffs when he was with Memphis, and I saw a kid who wasn't afraid of the moment," says Williams, the youngest head coach in the NBA when the Hornets hired him in June of 2010, nearly 18 months before they traded Quincy Pondexter for Vasquez. "He just had a reckless abandon about him, a belief in himself that was pretty contagious."

Last season, in his first campaign as a Horneet, Vasquez showed strides, improving his averages across the board while splitting time at the 1 with Jarrett Jack. This season, with Jack gone, GV led the League in total assists and has earned praise from Chris Paul for his play. So, toughness aside, what's the Venezuelan hero's key to success? Ironically enough, it's his height.

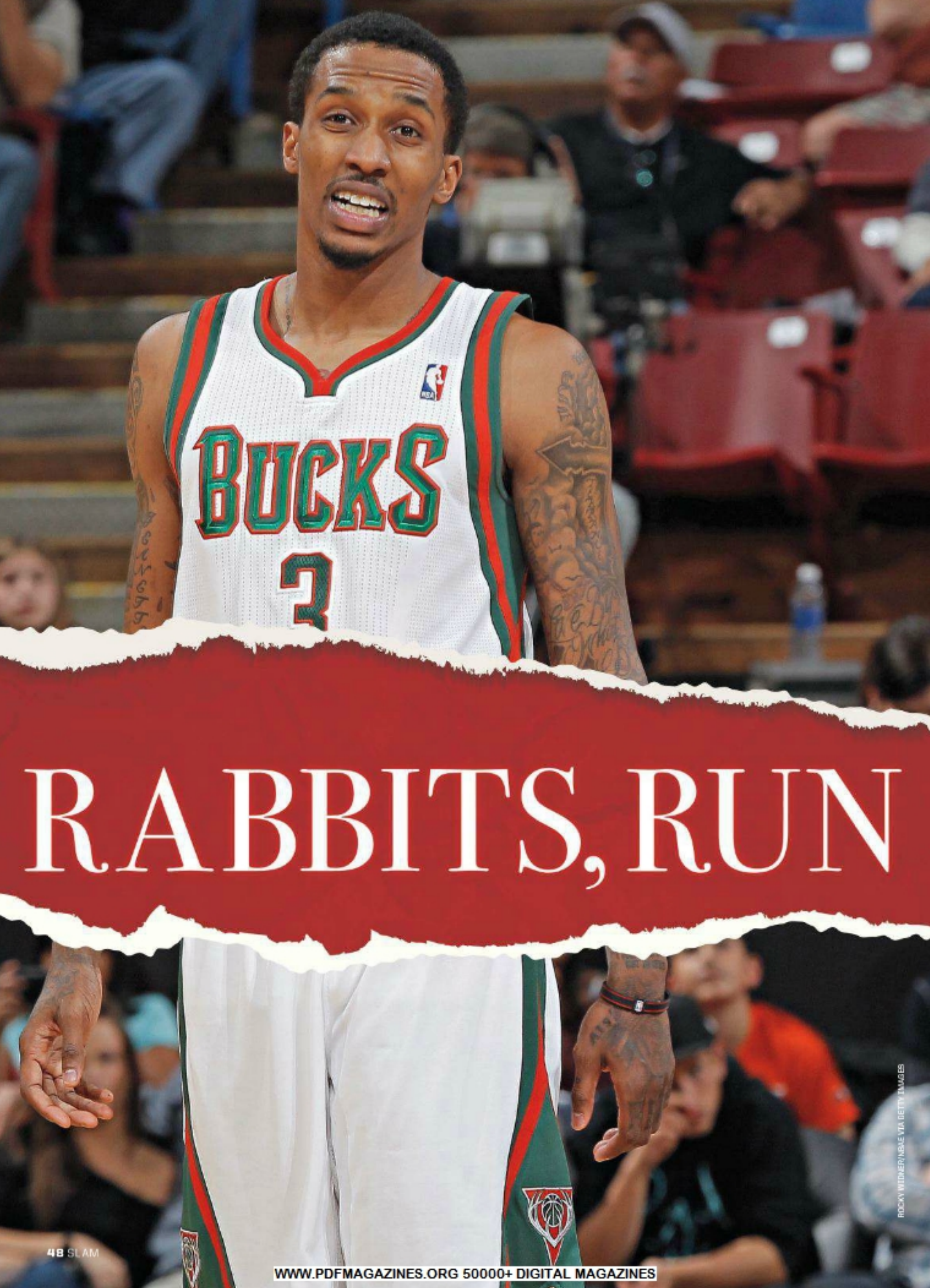
"When he's around the basket, he can get shots off that most guys can't," says Williams. "He's real crafty about getting you on his hip, and once he gets you on his hip he can finish with the best of 'em as a point guard. He's not Rod Strickland or Tony Parker, but there aren't many big guards that can play the way Greivis plays around the basket."

Says Vasquez, "A guy like Russell Westbrook is 50 to 70 percent more athletic than myself so he can do things I'm not gonna be able to do. But I can do things he's not able to do. I'm not afraid of any other point guard." ●

**"I WAS AFRAID—THERE WERE PEOPLE WITH GUNS OUT WATCHING US PLAY—BUT I'LL PLAY ANYWHERE."**







# RABBITS, RUN





discovery of a new, viable basketball blueprint? Is this the beginning or the end? Over the course of the past season-plus, there may not have been a more fun backcourt to watch than Milwaukee's duo of **Brandon Jennings** and **Monta Ellis**. But have we seen the last of them together?

The story of Monta Ellis and Brandon Jennings is a difficult one to scribble. Not for its main characters, nor for its setting or lack of plot lines. But for its proper tense. By **Abe Schwadron** Are we to talk about the past, present or future? Have we just witnessed a short-term experiment or a discovery of a new, viable

**T**he story of Brandon Jennings and Monta Ellis and is a difficult one to scribble. Not for its main characters, nor for its setting or lack of plot lines. But for its proper tense.

Are we to talk about these Milwaukee Bucks in the past, present or future? Have we just witnessed a short-term experiment or a new, viable basketball blueprint? Is this the beginning or the end? And while we're at it, how did they earn the nickname the Swag Twins?

With such deep philosophical questions afoot, it's fitting that they be met with another, albeit less metaphysical query—and more nicknames. "You talking about the two rabbits?"

With that, and a laugh, Milwaukee center Samuel Dalembert considers the first—and, potentially only—full season together for the Bucks speedy, smallish starting backcourt, after Ellis came over from Golden State at the 2012 trade deadline.

"I think they've managed to accommodate each other," says Dalembert, who from '01 to '06 played in Philadelphia alongside Allen Iverson, the best undersized scoring guard in League history.

That Jennings and Ellis have "accommodated" one another doesn't exactly inspire confidence in a backcourt combo that managed to lead Milwaukee to the No. 8 seed in the Eastern Conference and the



team's first Playoff bid since 2010. But it happens to be a fair assessment, since both Jennings and Ellis are high-volume shooters who have a hard time figuring out what to do when not handling the rock.

In the regular season, the pocket-sized pair put up nearly identical numbers while playing far more minutes than anyone else on the roster. Monta gave the Bucks 19.2 ppg on 41 percent shooting, plus 6.1 assists, 3.9 boards and 2 steals per game; Brandon averaged 17.6 points on 40 percent shooting, to go along with 6.6 apg, 3.1 rpg and 1.6 spg.

Only three shooting guards in the game put up more points per game than Ellis in '12-13: Kobe Bryant, James Harden and Dwyane Wade. Jennings was Top 10 in scoring among point guards. Veteran big man Drew Gooden, who has seen his fair share of top-notch backcourt blends over a decade-plus career with nine teams, says he ranks these Young Bucks right up there with Tony Parker and Manu Ginobili or Jason Kidd and Jason Terry. And yet, Milwaukee's team field goal percentage was fourth-worst in the NBA, and that short-lived trip to the post-season spot was achieved with a sub-.500 record in the inferior East.

Still, the fact is that sputtering teams around the League would kill to land an explosive player like Jennings or Ellis. Each has carved out not only a niche as a favorite among fans, but as one of the top scoring options at his position. They're also extremely likeable, leading the NBA to produce *Brandon & Monta*, a retro-style TV ad made to mimic the iconic 1970s sitcom *Laverne & Shirley*—the "original Milwaukee duo"—set to Norman Gimbel and Charles Fox's "Making Our Dreams Come True." The irony, of course, is that a commercial created to highlight the chemistry between the two had to be held until after the trade deadline, since Ellis' name in particular was abuzz in the rumor mill.

A year from now, that 30-second jingle could be irrelevant save for

the butt of a joke on a blog, or it could still be running as Milwaukee approaches another Playoff season. Because while together they make for one of pro ball's most unique and exciting guard tandems, with either ripe to go off for 40 points or an ankle-breaking highlight at a moment's notice, Ellis and Jennings appear to have, on the whole, co-existed more than meshed. Does having them play together make sense? Does essentially taking turns running the show really count as chemistry?

"We make fun sometimes," says Dalember, "Like, OK, the third quarter is Brandon's quarter, he'll start hitting some threes. And then after that, the fourth quarter, that's Monta's quarter."

It's at this point that proponents of the dynamic, diminutive duo nod in agreement, while critics cue the nervous laughter. Dalember continues: "If both have rough nights, as you can see throughout the year, we're in

deep sh—we're in deep trouble. But that doesn't happen often, so for the most part, if you got one off and the other one kicking in, we're still in the game."

On this night, an early April road contest in New York, it's Brandon's turn. Jennings, always up for games at the Garden, is firing on all cylinders. By the eight-minute mark of the third quarter, he's racked up 23

points, including four treys. Monta, meanwhile, is ice cold. He sits for nearly the entire second quarter before checking in with a minute before halftime, committing a foul and heading back to the bench 10 seconds later. Ellis finishes the night—a 101-83 loss—shooting 4-13 from the field and 1-7 from three-point range.

The result isn't itself a surprise, but it serves to once again expose that for as far as the Bucks have come, they still have a long way to go to reach even the East's second tier.

Update: By the time you read this, Brandon, Monta and the Bucks will have major off-season decisions to make in regards to the future of their franchise. Jennings, 23, is a restricted free agent this summer. Ellis, 27, has an \$11 million player-option for next season.

**"YOU PLAY WITH GUYS LIKE THAT,  
THEY'RE ALWAYS CREATING WITH  
THEIR PENETRATION OR THE  
ATTENTION THEY DRAW, SO IT'S GOOD  
FOR OTHER GUYS ON THE FLOOR."**

**—MBAH A MOUTE**







# SLAMUPS

CHRIS BOSH, HEAT



# SLAMUPS

TONY PARKER, SPURS





Is Milwaukee ready to commit long-term with "the rabbits" as franchise cornerstones? Ready to, as a Western Conference scout told *Sports Illustrated* in December, "live and die by Jennings and Ellis?"

As one bold YouTube commenter noted on the aforementioned commercial a week before the Playoffs began, "We're gonna make our dreams come true? If your dream is to get eliminated in 4 games by Miami, then yes your dreams will come true!" Indeed, conventional wisdom says you can't play Championship-level basketball with two guards shorter than 6-3 as your top options, even if the League has become more and more guard-driven over the past decade, and Milwaukee has sacrificed any semblance of post scoring for premier perimeter play.

Advanced stats can be manipulated to support either side of the argument. The Bucks' top five most efficient offensive lineups from the '12-13 season, for instance, featured both Ellis and Jennings, and in terms of net production by position, Milwaukee gets far and away its best numbers from the two guard slots. Then again, the Bucks struggled mightily on D with them on the floor—all eight of Milwaukee's worst defensive lineups included both guys.

"Sometimes we're a little small in the backcourt, but Monta really battles bigger, more physical players," admits Bucks head coach Jim Boylan, who took over the helm after Scott Skiles parted ways with the team just 32 games in.

Boylan himself has struggled to find the right way to pair Jennings and Ellis, having chafed Young Money with a surprise benching in late March and continuing to tinker with both players' minutes—an exercise complicated by the late-season addition of JJ Redick via trade. He still calls it a "work in progress," but Boylan contends that in today's NBA, the Bucks can win playing through BJ and ME.

"We move the ball. Guys pass. It's not like we don't find guys—everybody touches it," Boylan says. "It's not a team that's a greedy team. It's a team that moves the ball well and plays together."

Bucks forward Luc Mbah A Moute points out that the extra attention paid to the backcourt has opened up lanes for players like he and Ersan Ilyasova, who owes some of his recently signed \$40-million deal to his speedy guards. "You play with guys like that, they're always creating with their penetration or the attention they draw, so it's good for other guys. You can see it with Ersan getting stretch and getting shots," says Mbah A Moute. "These guys are so good at getting to the rim that it draws people. They understand that."

Like in back-to-back home wins for Milwaukee in early March, when Jennings dished out a career-high 19 assists to beat the Raptors, then had 17 more dimes against the Jazz. Ellis went off for 23 and 34 points in those games, and Ilyasova added 29 of the Bucks' 122 points against Toronto. That's what Milwaukee envisioned when Ellis came over last March with Ekpe Udoh and Kwame Brown in exchange for Stephen Jackson and Andrew Bogut. Only the adjustment—er, accommodation—period took time for the pair.

After the Knicks loss, Ellis is nowhere to be found in the post-game scrum at MSG. Jennings sits with a towel over his head and stares at the empty locker Monta has already vacated. "It was different," he says bluntly of his first few games on the court with Ellis last season. "We kind of have similar games. We both wanted to score a lot."

"But now we're just feeding off each other," continues Jennings. "We're comfortable."

Comfort doesn't breed success, though. Statistics be damned, the only



numbers that matter to management are in the win-loss column, where despite showing flashes en route to the Playoffs, the feeble sweep at the hands of the Heat was proof this version of the Bucks has fizzled.

"When you've got two guys who are the same type of player, after a whole full year they've played with each other, everybody's going to look at themselves in the mirror and say this is what I could have done better. That's what a professional does," Dalembert explains. "You're not going to be able to control what the organization is going to do, who they're going to keep or not."

Jennings has reiterated that he plans to keep his options open in regards to free agency, and Ellis has hinted at opting out of his deal, which means that in all likelihood, one or both may have played their final games in a Bucks uniform. On what will happen next, Jennings says only, "We'll see."

But short of Boylan and the Bucks pulling a rabbit or two out of a hat, one thing we won't see is this: the NBA's modern-day imagining of *Laverne & Shirley*, locked up together long-term. ☺



A NATIVE OF CANADA, A CHI-TOWN LEGEND, A COUPLE OF GIFTED BIG MEN AND A SET OF TWINS WALK INTO A ROOM... THIS IS NO JOKE, JUST MINI-BIOS OF THE GUYS WHO MAKE UP OUR LATEST ALL-AMERICAN TEAM. IF YOU DON'T KNOW 'EM BY NOW, STUDY UP.

IMAGE  
JEFF HARRIS

# SLAM 2013 HS ALL-AM



*From left, with height,  
position, high school and  
where they'll be next  
season.*

**AARON  
GORDON**

6-9, PF  
San Jose (CA)  
Archbishop Mitty  
Arizona

**AARON  
HARRISON**

6-5, SG  
Fort Bend (TX)  
Travis  
Kentucky

**ANDREW  
WIGGINS**

6-8, SF  
Huntington (WV)  
Prep  
Undecided

**ANDREW  
HARRISON**

6-5, PG  
Fort Bend (TX)  
Travis  
Kentucky

**JULIUS  
RANDLE**

6-9, PF  
Plano (TX)  
Prestonwood  
Kentucky

**JABARI  
PARKER**

6-8, SF  
Chicago (IL)  
Simeon  
Duke

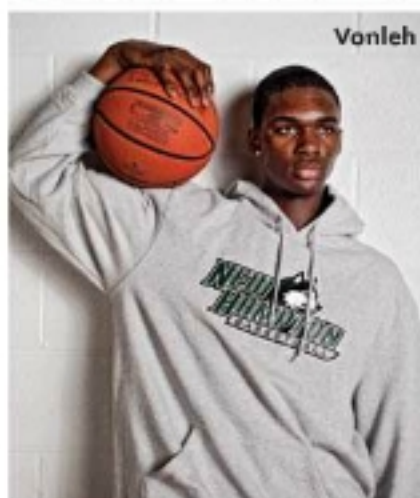
# ERICANS



# SLAM 2013 HS ALL-AMERICANS



Selden



Vonleh



Walker



Young

Name	Height	POS	Where they were	Where they'll be
<b>2ND TEAM - BOYS</b>				
Kasey Hill	6-1	PG	Montverde (FL) Academy	Florida
Wayne Selden	6-5	SG	Tilton (NH) School	Kansas
Noah Vonleh	6-8	PF	New Hampton (NH) School	Indiana
Chris Walker	6-10	PF	Bonifay (FL) Holmes County	Florida
James Young	6-6	SF	Rochester (MI) High	Kentucky

Name	Height	POS	Where they were	Where they'll be
<b>3RD TEAM - BOYS</b>				
Isaiah Hicks	6-8	PF	Oxford (NC) Webb	North Carolina
Dakari Johnson	6-10	C	Montverde (FL) Academy	Kentucky
Jarell Martin	6-8	PF	Baton Rouge (LA) Madison Prep	LSU
Austin Nichols	6-8	PF	Eads (TN) Briarcrest Christian	Memphis
Bobby Portis	6-10	PF	Little Rock (AR) Hall	Arkansas

Name	Height	POS	Where they were	Where they'll be
<b>HONORABLE MENTION - BOYS</b>				
Anthony Barber	6-2	PG	Hampton (VA) High	NC State
Jabari Bird	6-6	SG	Richmond (CA) Salesian	California
Joel Embiid	7-0	C	Gainesville (FL) Rock School	Kansas
Tyler Ennis	6-2	PG	Newark (NJ) St. Benedict's	Syracuse
Keith Frazier	6-5	SG	Dallas (TX) Kimball	Southern Methodist
Isaac Hamilton	6-5	SG	Bellflower (CA) St. John Bosco	UTEP
Zak Irvin	6-6	SF	Fishers (IN) Hamilton Southeastern	Michigan
Kuran Iverson	6-8	SF	Waynesboro (VA) Fishburne	Memphis
Demetrius Jackson	6-1	PG	Mishawaka (IN) Marian	Notre Dame
Rondae Hollis-Jefferson	6-7	SF	Chester (PA) High	Arizona
Matt Jones	6-4	SG	Dallas (TX) DeSoto	Duke
Rysheed Jordan	6-3	PG	Philadelphia (PA) Robert Vaux	St. John's
Jermaine Lawrence	6-9	PF	Sparta (NJ) Pope John XXII	Cincinnati
Marcus Lee	6-9	PF	Antioch (CA) Deer Valley	Kentucky
Nigel Williams-Goss	6-3	PG	Henderson (NV) Findlay	Washington



# SLAM *2013* HS ALL-AMERICANS

Name	Height	POS	Where they were	Where they'll be
<b>1ST TEAM - GIRLS</b>				
<b>Kaela Davis</b>	6-2	SG	Buford (GA) High	Georgia Tech
<b>Diamond DeShields</b>	6-2	SG/SF	Norcross (GA) High	North Carolina
<b>Linnae Harper</b>	5-6	PG	Chicago (IL) Whitney Young	Kentucky
<b>Taya Reimer</b>	6-3	SF/PF	Fishers (IN) Hamilton-Southeastern	Notre Dame
<b>Mercedes Russell</b>	6-5	C	Springfield (OR) High	Tennessee



Name	Height	POS	Where they were	Where they'll be
<b>2ND TEAM - GIRLS</b>				
<b>Oderah Chidom</b>	6-3	SF/PF	Oakland (CA) Bishop O'Dowd	Duke
<b>Kendall Cooper</b>	6-4	C	Carson (CA) St. Anthony	Duke
<b>Allisha Gray</b>	5-11	PG/SG	Sandersville (GA) Washington County	North Carolina
<b>Rebecca Greenwell</b>	6-1	SG	Owensboro (KY) Catholic	Duke
<b>Tyler Scaife</b>	5-9	PG	Little Rock (AR) Hall	Rutgers

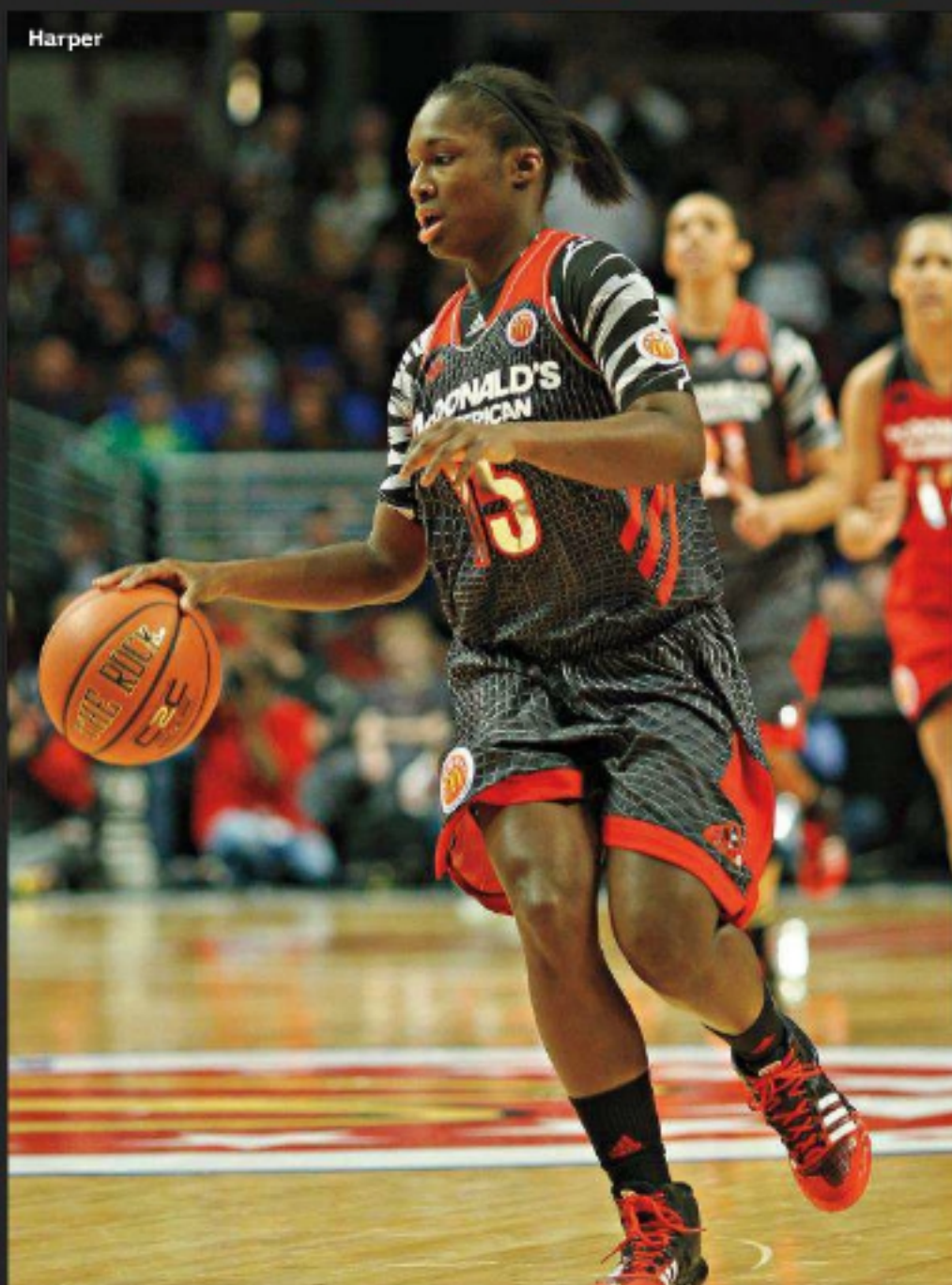
Name	Height	POS	Where they were	Where they'll be
<b>HONORABLE MENTION - GIRLS</b>				
<b>Lexie Brown</b>	5-9	PG	Suwanee (GA) North Gwinnett	Maryland
<b>Alaina Coates</b>	6-5	C	Irmo (SC) Dutch Fork	South Carolina
<b>Rebekah Dahlman</b>	5-9	PG/SG	Braham (MN) High	Vanderbilt
<b>Kai James</b>	6-4	C	Palm Beach Gardens (FL) Dwyer	Florida State
<b>Jessica Jackson</b>	6-3	SF/PF	Jacksonville (AR) High	Arkansas
<b>Kailee Johnson</b>	6-3	SF/PF	Portland (OR) Central Catholic	Stanford
<b>Stephanie Mavunga</b>	6-3	SF/PF	Indianapolis (IN) Brownsburg	North Carolina
<b>Erica McCall</b>	6-3	SG/SF	Bakersfield (CA) Ridgeview	Stanford
<b>Ieshia Small</b>	5-11	SG/SF	Tallahassee (FL) Florida State	Baylor
<b>Jessica Washington</b>	5-8	PG	Tulsa (OK) Jenks	North Carolina



# THE KING



Hale



Harper

## 10AC ELITE SHOWCASE RECAP

**March 23, Southwest Tennessee Community College, Memphis, TN**

It's not typical for a big-time high school event to keep things in-house. What makes national, and even regional, games so exciting is the chance to observe the best players from different corners of the country compete against one another. But when there's an excess of talent in your own backyard, all you need is a local gymnasium and an accompanying set of spectators. Such was the case in Memphis for the inaugural 10ac Elite Showcase.

Organized by the same group that put together New York's Big Strick Classic, the showcase was filled with high-major recruits from Tennessee's 2013, '14 and '15 classes. Packed into Southwest Tennessee Community College's tight gym, the players were evenly split into two teams—Red and Blue—and in a transition-heavy game, the Blue team narrowly escaped with a 145-140 victory.

There were a number of DI-caliber players—including Alabama-bound senior swingman Shannon Hale and 6-11 soph Skal Labissiere, who already has an offer from Kentucky—but two juniors stood out the most, showing why they are considered program-changers at the next level: Jalen Lindsey and Leron Black.

Lindsey was the man of the hour for the Blue team, finishing with 24 points and 15 rebounds en route to being named team MVP and showing why Louisville, Florida and Ohio State want him to sign on the dotted line. The 6-7, 185-pound combo forward is a cerebral player with freakish athleticism. Lindsey has great length, can shoot out to 20 feet and understands how to get his own while playing within the flow of an offense.

For the Red team, Leron Black (35 points and 22 rebounds) was the most impressive player in the building. At 6-7, 215-pounds, Black is too agile and quick for bigger defenders and too massive for smaller ones. He has the speed and athleticism to flourish in transition and

has an arsenal of moves to set up anywhere and go to work in the half court. Simply put, Black dominated in Memphis.

The talent in Tennessee isn't covered as heavily as it is in New York or California, but make no mistake about it: As a collective entity, the boys in the Volunteer State can play with anybody in the country.—**ELDON KHORSHIDI**

## MCDONALD'S ALL-AMERICAN GAME (GIRLS)

**April 3, United Center, Chicago, IL**

If Chi-Town's own Jabari Parker was the homecoming king for McDonald's All-American Week, then Linae Harper was the queen. Harper, a PG from Whitney Young HS in the Windy City, got a well-deserved encore for her career at the United Center. "I'm just lost for words to be able to play in front of my fans and family," Harper said.

The 5-6 dynamo fueled her West team to a 92-64 victory by tallying 8 points, 3 rebounds



# SPRING

AFTER A WINTER OF DOMINATING THEIR LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL COMPETITION, THE BEST PREP PLAYERS WENT HEAD-TO-HEAD ON THE ALL-AMERICAN CIRCUIT.

and 4 assists in a game that she couldn't wait to be a part of. "Surprisingly, I really wasn't nervous," Harper said. "I was excited to step on the court. You live for these moments."

It was Harper's teammate, Mercedes Russell, who took home MVP honors with 16 points and 12 rebounds on 7-10 shooting. "Before I came here, I was really working on my shot," Russell said. "Since there were no practices, I had my own workouts. I was just making sure I was following through and got my shot up."

Russell and West teammate Jordan Reynolds are both Oregon natives headed to Tennessee next season. At 5-10, Reynolds is seven inches shorter than Russell, but her 10 points and 11 rebounds showed that she could work the glass, too. "I've seen a lot of great things from her in the game," Russell said. "I know she's

going to get better, and she's already good."

Despite the one-sided game, the East team got a strong night from Diamond DeShields, the future North Carolina forward, who finished with a team-high 15 points and 4 steals. After the game, she summed up what everyone was thinking. "To know that I'll be going on to the next level to play with those girls is exciting."

—DAVID CASSILO

## MCDONALD'S ALL-AMERICAN GAME (BOYS)

April 3, United Center, Chicago, IL

Aaron Gordon won't be forgetting his trip to Chicago anytime soon.

The San Jose, CA, product kicked things off the day before the McDonald's All-American

Game by announcing that he was committing to Arizona.

A day later, he showed everyone what the Wildcats were getting by erupting for 24 points and 8 rebounds to earn the game's MVP award in his West team's 110-99 victory. While the 6-8 athletic freak used his share of thunderous dunks to get the crowd going, Gordon believed his attention to the little things was what helped him dominate. "I try to focus on the technical parts of basketball—jumping to the ball, being on help side and talking on defense," Gordon said. "In an All-Star game where it's not so structured, those things really help and let you excel."

While Gordon stole the show, most eyes at the United Center were trained on Chicago native Parker and Canada's Andrew Wiggins.



Gordon



Randle





The top two players in the country guarded each other for most of the game, and although Parker's team won, Wiggins prevailed in the individual battle, with 19 points and 6 rebounds, while holding Parker to 10 points on 4-13 shooting. "I look forward to playing against him in the future," Wiggins said. "I know I'll be seeing his face a lot at the next level and the level after that."

The locals came out to see Parker's face one last time. The winner of four state titles at Simeon, he completed one of the greatest high school careers in the city's history.

Playing the game in his hometown was the perfect ending to that career. "I know that I represent other high school players," Parker said, "so that's all I wanted to do—be there and represent the city of Chicago." —DC

## NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL INVITATIONAL

**April 6, Hanley Center, North Bethesda, MD**

It was on this same stage last year that

Montverde (FL) Academy found itself so close to the highly coveted National High School Invitational (NHSI) title. The Eagles were up by 18 in the second half of the championship game with the title seemingly in their hands. Then, the unthinkable happened. Their opponents, Findlay (NV) Prep, managed to pull off the comeback and steal the victory in overtime.

This time around, Montverde was once again back in the title game and in a familiar but somewhat different situation. In this match, they were the ones facing the double-digit deficit in the second half to Newark (NJ) St. Benedict's, which had knocked off the defending champs Findlay to get there. Down by 16 points late in the third quarter, Montverde knew firsthand that it's not over 'til it's over.

A 10-0 run in the middle of the fourth quarter moved Montverde within 3, fueled by three-pointers from Florida-bound PG Kasey Hill, Miguel Cartagena and junior-stud D'Angelo Russell. As the game ticked down to the final minute of play, and with St.

Benedict's still up 62-61, Kentucky-signee Dakari Johnson muscled his way in to the basket for a tough and-one, giving Montverde the lead at 64-62 with 24.1 seconds remaining. Syracuse-bound PG Tyler Ennis gave Orange fans a preview of what's to come, hitting a clutch three-pointer at the other end of the floor to regain the lead for St. Benedict's, 65-64, with about 10 seconds left. Hill then raced up the floor and drew the defense in the lane before kicking it out to Jalyn Patterson in the right corner for a buzzer-beating three-pointer and the championship victory at 67-65.

"It was actually crazy how it worked out, that we were down by so much and still won, but we were up so much last year and lost," said Hill. "We just found a way to battle through adversity and get the victory." Added Johnson, "I just didn't want to lose."

Johnson took home MVP honors after dropping 18 points and collecting 8 rebounds, while Hill contributed 19 points, 6 rebounds and 5 assists. —FRANKLYN CALLE

## JORDAN BRAND CLASSIC

**April 13, Barclays Center, Brooklyn, NY**

The knock on all-star games is that guys don't play defense and they lack seriousness and intensity. But if we learned anything about the Class of 2013 at the Jordan Brand Classic, it's that these guys want to win, real badly. There were no such things as easy baskets for most of the night—not even on breakaways. "[The coaches] stressed that they wanted the game to be competitive and they wanted us to play hard, so from the beginning of the game we knew we had to go out there and play hard, and if we didn't, we weren't going to be able to play," said Kentucky-bound power forward Julius Randle after winning co-MVP honors for his 19-point, 7-rebound performance. "It was fun for sure, but we all wanted to get the win and that was the main goal."

The hard-nosed defense led to the game being tight throughout, with the largest lead by either team only being 7 and with the scoreboard tied on 14 different occasions. As a result, the game came down to the final couple of possessions, where with 50.5 seconds remaining and the game tied at 96 apiece, Washington-bound point guard Nigel Williams-Goss converted a conventional three-point play, followed by a couple of free throws later on, to seal the win for the West, 102-98.

The game, which was played at the brand new state-of-the-art Barclays Center, marked Michael Jordan's return to his birthplace of Brooklyn. To celebrate, the game's namesake watched the future stars from a suite at midcourt.

Joining Randle with co-MVP honors was Duke-bound small forward Jabari Parker.



The 6-8 Chicago native finished with 16 points and 7 rebounds. Other notable top performers include Williams-Goss, who led the West in scoring with 17 points (6-7 from the floor) and 4 assists, and Andrew Wiggins, the uncommitted top-ranked prospect in the nation, who was tied with Randle for a game-high of 19 points, to go along with 5 rebounds.

To cap off the night, the All-Americans joined rapper Drake up on stage as he performed, foreshadowing the big stage they're expected to excel on at the next level.

—FRANKLYN CALLE

## DERBY FESTIVAL BASKETBALL CLASSIC

**April 19, Freedom Hall, Louisville, KY**

Entering its 40th year, the Derby Festival Basketball Classic is the nation's longest running all-star game...and doesn't appear to be slowing down at all. Held in Louisville as a part of the Kentucky Derby Festival, the game has featured the likes of Isiah Thomas, Penny Hardaway and Dominique Wilkins. This year's version, aligned with Under Armour, lived up to the game's lofty rep.

Boasting 11 players going to Kentucky, Louisville or Indiana, the atmosphere was live given the intensity of the fans of those programs. The game also had a number of McDonald's All-Americans and top-50 ballers, leaving no shortage of talent. Things popped off on Thursday at the Night of Future Stars. Louisville crushed the event, with Anton Gill, who has already committed to Coach Pitino's program, taking home the dunk contest crown, and Dillon Avare, another future Cardinal, winning the three-point contest.

"After being introduced, I didn't think that many fans would show up," Indiana-bound Troy Williams says. "It was so great to meet the people we'll be playing in front of."

Once the game started, the action—which you might have caught livestreaming on SLAMonline—was fast and furious. Dallas-bred off-guard Keith Frazier got buckets with ease, drilling a number of NBA threes and banging some nice dunks in transition. The man who got him the rock, Kansas-bound Conner Frankamp, shot the lights out and had a few Steve Nash-esque finishes. LSU combo forward Jarrell Martin led the White team with 20, but still fell short 124-113 as the buzzer sounded.

For the victors, Syracuse-bound playmaker Tyler Ennis had 20, 7 and 4, and will be taking his talent to Syracuse next season. Indiana's Luke Fischer will help fill the void left by Cody Zeller, and the 7-footer showed some major progress. His future teammate Troy Williams stole the show though. The 6-6 wing won the Black MVP by hanging 21 points, 5 boards and 4 dimes on the White, including the play of the game—a filthy poster on 6-10 Akoy Agau. "I got past Jarrell Martin and it was an open

lane, just me and the rim," Williams said. "I didn't even see him coming until it was already too late." —RODGER BOHN

## NIKE HOOP SUMMIT

**April 20, Rose Garden, Portland, OR**

For three weeks every April, the top teenage hoopsters across the world come together and compete in a bevy of all-star games to spotlight the next generation's top stars. From the McDonald's All-American Game to the Jordan Brand Classic, precocious players like Jabari Parker and Andrew Wiggins get to know each other by doing constant battle with and against one another while traversing the high school exhibition circuit. The 2013 Nike Hoop Summit would serve as the tour's final stop.

While so many stepped into the Rose Garden to observe top stars like Parker and Wiggins, international players like Dennis Schroeder, Dante Exum and the game's MVP, Livio Jean-Charles, used the spotlight to announce to the world that they also have next. Jean-Charles, the 6-10 native of French Guiana, went off against the Americans by

rim slashing and board crashing to finish with 27 points and 13 rebounds in a performance that made a few draft pundits consider raising his stock to a first-round grade. "He's so tall," Parker says. "He rebounds. That's where we struggled at—defensive rebounds. He got a lot of opportunities on the offensive end getting put backs. He's just really good."

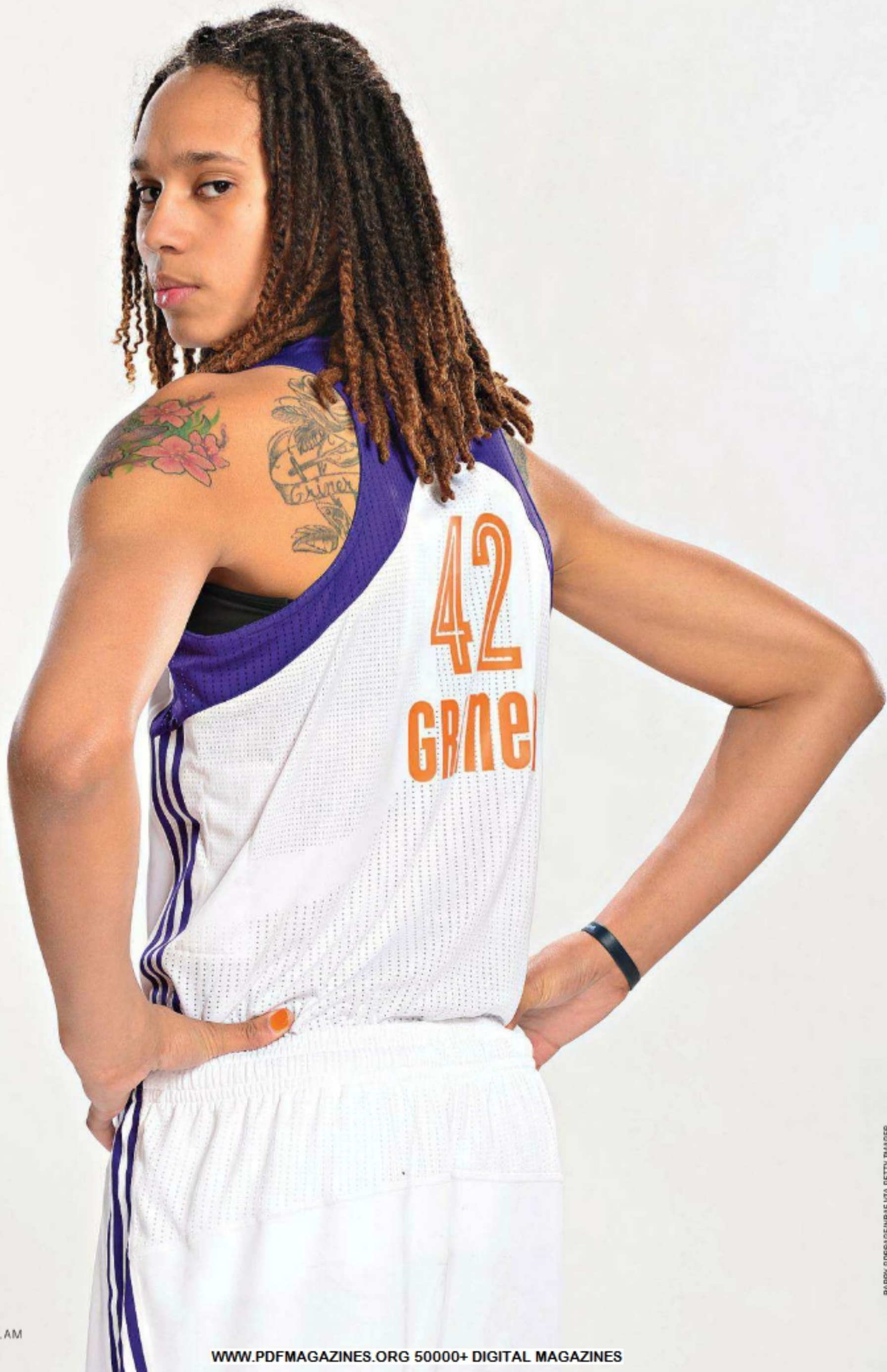
The World Select team's backcourt duo of Germany's Schroeder and Australia's Exum delivered an appetizer to fans hoping to see them both playing in the States full-time. Schroeder's craftiness and athleticism at point makes him an appealing prospect, one who will be in the League sooner than later. Exum, the son of former North Carolina Tar Heel and 1982 National Champion Cecil, is just 17 and is hopeful to bring a smooth and polished game to a college campus in the fall of '14.

What comes next for these kids on the basketball court will surely be fun to watch, but now we have a few more names to add to our watch list. All we can do is cross our fingers and pray we'll get to see these matchups yet again in college, and maybe even the pros.

—EDDIE MAISONET, III









# TEMPERATURE RISING

As the weather warms up, so does the WNBA action. And with an infusion of new talent, this season may be the W's hottest one yet. BY CLAY KALLAM

**Y**ou couldn't avoid ESPN's "3 to See" campaign no matter how hard you tried, and now the trio of rookies—Brittney Griner, Elena Delle Donne and Skylar Diggins—are in the WNBA, which means we'll get even more hype, especially since the network just signed a long-term deal with the league.

So where do the talking heads go from here? Consider the possibilities...The GOAT (?): If Griner stays healthy, very likely yes. If her offense continues to improve, she'll be one of those once-in-a-generation players who can control a game at both ends of the floor. The Blonde Bomber: If you like tall attractive women who can shoot like Stephen Curry, then Elena Delle Donne's for you. But you better be 6-5, and you better not play her in HORSE, because she simply does not miss. Glamorous and Gritty: Skylar Diggins has got the look—and even if Weezy doesn't get the Prince reference, it won't take long for anyone who sees her to understand. But Diggins has more than glamour; she's a get-it-done player who defends and rises to the occasion in the clutch.

## Western Conference

### 1. MINNESOTA (27-7, FIRST)

Many are already conceding the West to Phoenix, but Griner is

a rookie, and the Lynx are a rare combination of youth and experience—plus pure talent. Lindsay Whalen, Seimone Augustus, Maya Moore, Rebekkah Brunson and friends aren't just going to roll over because the Mercury picked up a dunker.

### 2. PHOENIX (7-27, SIXTH)

Tank, schmank ... the Mercury "rested" a lot of "injured" stars last year and wound up winning the Griner sweepstakes. They now have her, Candice Dupree, Penny Taylor and Diana Taurasi, but the key is how good second-year point guard Sammy Prahalis will be. And there are legitimate questions about how much the 32-year-old Taylor has left after a career hampered by injuries.

### 3. LOS ANGELES (24-10, SECOND)

Free-agent signee Lindsey Harding filled the biggest void for the Sparks, and with Candace Parker, Nneka Ogwumike and Kristi Toliver, the lack of a true center seems incidental. The Sparks would coast to first in the East but they're a half-step behind the top two in what could be the strongest conference the league has ever seen.

### 4. SAN ANTONIO (21-13, THIRD)

Dan Hughes is a superb coach, and even without Sophia Young, he'll get the Silver Stars into the postseason—for whatever that first-round playoff pasting will be worth. After all, even

Becky Hammon has to give in to advancing age at some point.

### 5. TULSA (9-25, FIFTH)

Six-eight Australian Liz Cambage bailed on Tulsa, backing out of her WNBA commitment at the last minute—and leaving the Shock with a nice backcourt (Diggins and Candice Wiggins) but no size up front. Young forward Glory Johnson is good, but not enough.

### 6. SEATTLE (16-18, FOURTH)

No Sue Bird. No Lauren Jackson. Not many wins.

## Eastern Conference

### 1. NEW YORK (15-19, FOURTH)

Bill Laimbeer is back, and he's got Cappie Pondexter to go along with a lot of veteran firepower. The Liberty aren't great, but neither is the rest of the East, and if Kara Braxton and the rookie posts pound the boards, New York's toughness will be the difference.

### 2. CHICAGO (14-20, FIFTH)

A healthy Epiphanny Prince, the outside game of Delle Donne and Sylvia Fowles in the paint is a deadly offensive combination. Point guard Courtney Vandersloot, though, has to take a great leap forward for the Sky to jump past New York.

### 3. INDIANA (22-12, SECOND)

The Fever have plenty of pieces, but the pieces are getting a little frayed at the edges. Katie Douglas and Finals' MVP Tamika

Catchings will both turn 34 this season, though if they each play 30 games and Erlana Larkins builds on her 2012 breakout season, Indiana could win the East.

### 4. ATLANTA (19-15, THIRD)

Everyone's back from a scary group—except point guard Lindsey Harding. In her place is Jasmine Thomas, who was the lead guard for 5-29 Washington last summer. The erratic, entertaining and vastly talented Angel McCoughtry will once again take center stage, but will new coach Fred Lewis be able to keep her act from disrupting the team?

### 5. CONNECTICUT (25-9, FIRST)

It's subtraction by addition, as Anne Donovan, a consistently mediocre coach, takes over for Mike Thibault, and it's subtraction by subtraction with Ashja Jones taking the summer off. MVP Tina Charles, Kara Lawson and Renee Montgomery, in that order, are quality players, but the dropoff is steep after that, and there's no reason to believe Donovan will have the answers.

### 6. WASHINGTON (5-29, SIXTH)

Thibault moves over from Connecticut, and though the roster is pretty bare, he'll get a lot more out of this mismatched collection than Trudi Lacey ever did. Even "a lot more," however, might not mean much more than 10 wins as Crystal Langhorne is pretty much all alone. 🏀









# FORGET THE

## “MACHINE GUN” MOLLY BOLIN IS PROBABLY THE BEST FEMALE GUARD YOU’VE NEVER HEARD OF.

BY MATT CAPUTO

**T**here’s a crowd gathering outside Staples Center for a late-season WNBA game between the New York Liberty and the hometown Los Angeles Sparks. If you didn’t know there was a basketball game inside the arena here tonight, you might think you were at Disneyland. There are pre-game festivities for all ages outside the building, with music and face painting for both kids and adults. The arriving spectators are families; packs of young daughters wearing Sparks jerseys and little girls lugging huge homemade banners.

The Sparks are riding a winning streak and Staples Center is filling up. Many of those attending tonight’s game stop and take pictures in front of the statues outside the arena that honor L.A. sports legends. Standing with her husband and daughter next to the statue of Magic Johnson is a blonde-haired woman with large sunglasses and a polite smile. No one in the gathering crowd of basketball fanatics notices her, but without her, they’d probably be at the actual Disneyland tonight.

“It’s amazing to see statues of people who were playing when I



played," Molly says, extending her hand.

The woman is "Machine Gun" Molly Bolin (now Molly Kazmer), one of the first stars of the Women's Professional Basketball League (or WBL), a short-lived but pioneering attempt between 1978-81 to create women's pro hoops. While there has yet to be a 50-point game in the WNBA, Molly broke her own records by scoring 50, 53, 54 and 55 points in WBL games. Her opponents remember her for possessing a shot that "could just kill you" and for being an "adorable blonde." She had endorsement deals and later shared a Spalding commercial with Larry Bird. The success Molly reached on the court was almost equally matched by the hardship she faced off it. She fought a bitter custody battle with her ex-husband and watched as lawyers used her busy basketball career and good looks against her.

When the league folded, Molly's popularity and talent—like those of her contemporaries such as that of Ann Meyers, Carol Blazejowski and Nancy Lieberman—went largely unutilized. Molly re-married and raised a family but never caught a break in pro hoops again. Her records are largely unrecognized and she's still basically as unknown as she was coming out of a small JuCo—already a mother—and dominating women's pro hoops.

"I went to the Forum to watch the Lakers play. I haven't been here," Molly says, finding her seat at Staples. "It's so different than it was. The Showtime days were awesome."

**M**onna Lea Van Venthuisen was born in Dryden, Ontario, while her father was working on the TransCanada pipeline, but grew up in the small Iowa town of Moravia. She picked up basketball in the tiny community where going to girls' high school basketball games is a big deal.

In her first game as a high school junior, Molly scored 63 points on her 16th birthday and finished the season averaging 50 ppg. As a senior Molly scored over 70 points in 32-minute games five times and set a single-game scoring record of 83 points. "I think we had some girls out sick and I had to pick up the slack," shrugs Molly, who averaged 54.8 points her senior year. "I just took over the game, that was kind of how I always did it. It was time to win, I wanted the ball and I was going to take over. I didn't mean to be such a ball hog, but I wanted to win."

Girls' high school hoops in Iowa was not always a full-court game. Molly played Iowa's unique "six-player" version, which was effec-

tively a half-court game where only forwards can shoot and teams take possession at mid-court. Inside those rules Molly totaled 1,370 points her senior year and was named an All-American. "College wasn't the same experience as high school and I had to learn the five-on-five full-court game pretty quickly. In fact, right out of high school in 1975, I got recruited to try out for the '75 Pan American team and I couldn't even dribble full-court and make a basket," Molly says. "But because I scored 55 a game, they wanted me there and I made the final cut."

Molly set several school records, but playing at Grand View College—a two-year school—in Des Moines did little for her reputation. After one year, Molly decided to try something different. "I sat out my second year, got married, had a baby and came back my third year to a different coach," Molly says. "So I only played two years of college."

Molly married Dennie Bolin after her freshman year and the couple had a baby boy, Damien, in 1977. Molly stayed at home and took care of Damien while Dennie worked for a year, then played a second season at Grand View before going pro with the Iowa Cornets of the new WBL. "When I finished my second year of eligibility, the WBL started and the GM turned out to be my first college coach and so I was one of the first people he recruited," Molly says. "That's why Iowa was first to join the first women's pro league and they made a big deal out of signing my contract in the governor's office to sort of make history, as the first player to sign to a contract."

Molly turned pro as the WBL was trying a variety of ways to promote itself. In one plan executed before the inaugural season, Iowa Cornets owner and trampoline mogul George Nissen financed a film called *Dribble* (now *Scoring*) starring "Pistol" Pete Maravich, who'd just had a knee injury. The Cornets were used as extras in the film and Molly got to know the legendary point guard on set.

"We sort of had a crush on each other but it was like, it wasn't going to happen because we were both married and we were both very loyal that way," Molly says. "It was something I carried around for a long time."

When the time for actual basketball started, the players were sure it was the start of something that would shine an early light on women's pro sports. The first women's league started with eight teams; the Houston Angels, New York Stars, Dayton Rockettes, New Jersey Gems in the Eastern Division and

Chicago Hustle, Minnesota Fillies, Milwaukee Does and Molly's Iowa Cornets in the Midwest Division. "We knew we were paving the way for the future and I believed in it," says Molly, who earned \$900 a month that first year. "Even when people talked about teams struggling or the WBL folding, I never bought into any of it. I was focused on what I was gonna do to make it successful and keep myself in a job for a while."

Her still-limited full-court skills confined Molly to the bench initially, but she caught fire and finished with 53 points in a mid-season game. She averaged 16 points per game for the Cornets. Still, despite her budding career, Molly had a family to care for. "I was like the only wife and mother," Molly says. "That was hard because the more successful I got, the more points I scored, the more I was in demand."

In the WBL's second year, Ann Meyers, Carol Blazejowski and Luisa Harris all joined the league after having sat out to retain their Olympic eligibility. Despite the new talent, Molly still ruled, averaging over 32 points per. Molly became a star as the league idled but was still barely earning a living. "Although we had one of the most successful teams in terms of the attendance and exposure, the big thing they came up with was they were going to finance photo shoots so I could sell posters," Molly remembers. "I did get a pay raise, but it wasn't anywhere near what the other top players got."

Molly and Ann Meyers were named co-MVPs in the spring of 1980, but the league was struggling. Having grown tired of the WBL's low pay, long road trips and instability, Molly joined the startup Ladies Professional Basketball Association, a Southwestern-based league with plans to cut costs and travel. "I had somebody aggressively recruiting me," Molly says. "They flew me to California and promised me the sun and the stars, and \$30,000 and I took it."

The LPBA only lasted seven games before Molly was looking to get back to the WBL. She negotiated with six teams before choosing to join the San Francisco Pioneers, a club with a retired NBA player, Dean Meminger, as its coach. Meminger was a selling point, as Molly was eager to learn from the best possible teachers. "He would be on the court with us and he'd make us take charges from him," Molly remembers. "He was an NBA player, you know? So I loved playing for him."

With Meminger as her mentor, Molly blossomed. In the third WBL all-star game, Molly

"WE KNEW WE WERE PAVING THE WAY FOR THE FUTURE AND I BELIEVED IN IT."





led all scorers with 29 points. "She didn't look like an athlete per se, but she'd score from everywhere on the floor," says Donna Orender, a three-year WBL vet and later WNBA commissioner. "She was unbelievable."

But by the spring of 1981, the WBL was in trouble. The league shrunk to eight teams and collapsed altogether after the season ended. Though Molly was left without a league to play in, she still had a lot of game. "If it came down to offense at the last second, she would be the person I'd go to," Meminger remembers. "She would be my Kobe Bryant or Kevin Durant. She was bold and confident."

The league folding was a great hardship for all the women of the WBL, but Molly faced a whole new challenge in the court of law. She and Dennie argued often during her time in the WBL. He didn't like how much time Molly devoted to playing and promoting basketball. "They wanted me to do off-court appearances and interviews and my husband thought that the husband worked and the wife stayed home," Molly says. "Someone got him a t-shirt that said 'Molly's Husband' and he wore it to games."

By the WBL's last season, Molly and Dennie had split for good and a nasty custody battle ensued. "When we got divorced, they used the fact that I was the breadwinner and played pro basketball against me," Molly remembers.

In October 1982, Dennie's lawyer made a case that Molly spent too much time traveling

to games and that glamour photos she posed for to promote the league made her unfit to raise a child. "They promoted and marketed me as a blonde, you know, pinup, and that got attention," Molly says. "I was OK with that. I was the leading scorer in the league. I had no problem taking pictures because if they came to the game, they could see I could play."

However, the Iowa court saw a problem with it and awarded custody of Damien to Dennie. It was another battle of the sexes and a landmark ruling that put gender equality into question. The Supreme Court did overturn the judgment and for years afterward Molly's case was cited in divorce and custody proceedings around the country.

**I**t's Latino Celebration Night at the Sparks game. There's an elaborate laser sequence flashing on the Jumbotron inviting everyone to stay for a post-game concert from Jon Secada. It's louder than a novice WNBA fan might expect and there's a feeling that everyone is getting their money's worth. The WNBA launched in 1997 and—although Molly attended the 10th anniversary—she's had nothing to do with the league otherwise. Tonight, in August 2012, Molly is at her first regular-season WNBA game. "That's a good, strong move there," Molly says, watching Candace Parker beat a defender. "The players are a lot better ballhandlers."

Molly spent the years after the WBL living

in California. She played recreationally and joined several groups that tried to establish new women's leagues to no avail. She spent time shooting around with the Lakers and watching them practice. "Magic was a huge flirt. I was in the stands at practice and he was always winking," Molly recalls.

She's been away from women's pro basketball for many years and is remarried with two more children. Her husband, John Kazmer, played for both Lute Olson and Jerry Tarkanian at Long Beach State, but none of their kids hoop. After several attempts to stay in the game, Molly tried broadcasting, construction and house painting, but she's settled into a career in real estate.

What Molly hasn't found in the years since she stopped playing is a place in history. Her 50-plus games pre-dated the WNBA and aren't recognized. She also isn't in either the Naismith or Women's basketball Hall of Fame. "I'm thinking she should be," says Roy Johnson, who wrote about Molly for *Sports Illustrated* in 1981. "She was right ahead of the trailblazers, she was ahead of the people who were recognized as the architects of the women's game."

While no one can take away Molly's accolades, she's still hoping that someone will remember them and honor her. "I see people every year inducted and I kicked their butts up and down the court," Molly says. "But I guess it's not about how good you were." 🏀





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OUT NOW, \$140  
NIKE HYPERDUNK 2013  
JULY 1, \$140  
JORDAN CP3.VI AE  
OUT NOW, \$125







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# KICKS ONCOURT



From top:  
NIKE HYPERDUNK 2013  
JULY 1, \$140  
K1X ANTIGRAFFITI  
OUT NOW, \$100  
AND 1 ENTOURAGE MID  
"5 ELEMENTS" PACK;  
NOVEMBER 1, \$100





From top:  
UNDER ARMOUR SPINE BIONIC LOW  
OUT NOW, \$100  
AND 1 ENTOURAGE MID  
"5 ELEMENTS" PACK,  
NOVEMBER 1, \$100  
JORDAN TRUNNER DOMINATE PRO  
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# ELITISTS

For the second straight season, Nike is bringing some choice heat for the Playoffs.

How many times have you watched LeBron James do something on a basketball court that made you think, "This dude isn't human." Or typed "Is Kevin Durant actually a robot?" into your Google search bar?

You don't read comic books. You don't need to. Your favorite superheroes hit the hardwood 82 regular-season games a year, plus Playoffs. So it's only right for Nike to lace its leading men in proper superhero attire, no? Building off last year's first-ever Elite series, the sneaker freakers at the Swoosh are back in a bold way, having masterminded the Nike Basketball Elite Series 2.0 for the 2013 postseason. The collection includes amped-up editions of the Kobe 8, KD V and LeBron X like you've never seen or felt before. "When you talk about the Elite series, the original concept was taking the shackles off and unleashing the designers to go nuts and create the highest-performance stuff we can," says Nike Basketball Design Director Leo Chang.

"It's all really driven by the initial insights we got from LeBron. He said early on, 'When I'm playing in the Playoffs I want something different, I want something that's even better.'"

Having evolved from last year's pilot, the Elite Series 2.0 is without a doubt the most technically advanced Nike basketball creation to date. Carbon fiber for lightweight resiliency, Kevlar for protective fit and lock-down, foam for comfort.



Not to mention refreshingly vibrant colorways.

"Last year, we set a tone of seriousness that it's Playoff time, and everyone has this mentality shift. This time around, we have that, too, but we can also have some fun with it," Chang says. "We wanted to be more expressive with the colors."

"You have three amazing athletes that in their own right, are already superheroes," Chang notes, before wondering, "What if they had their own super powers, what would it be?"

For LeBron, it's being indestructible, like diamonds. For Kobe—who, due to injury, never got to lace up in his 2.0s—X-ray vision emitted by the Black Mamba's heat-

sensing eyes. And for KD, the Elite series rookie, it's lightning speed. His KD V Elite features the most prominent change to any of the kicks—by cutting its silhouette back to a low-top look and adding a caged Nike Zoom unit in the heel.

Nike not only wanted to elevate its construction components to the highest possible level but also wanted to create moments that go beyond team color palettes. And, like any good superhero team—from X-Men to The Avengers—they share a common, uniform thread: Hyper Blue.

The only question now is which hero will take his team to the Finals, where a special gold-trimmed, Nike+ enabled Finals colorway awaits, along with the Larry O'Brien Trophy.—**ABE SCHWADRON**

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## Book

Vernon Earl Monroe Jr.'s first basket was made in a milk crate nailed to a wooden post in a vacant lot outside Vacation Bible School in south Philadelphia. Divine intervention would carry "Black Jesus" from his youth (fittingly spent on Alter Street) to his later life as a Madison Square Guardian angel for the Knicks during the 1973 Championship season.

His new memoir, *Earl the Pearl: My Story*, which Monroe wrote with Quincy Troupe, details all of that minutia and all of Pearl's back story. But more than that, it's a book about finding your passion, overcoming prejudice, transcending basketball stereotypes, igniting a league and cementing a legacy. Like Earl Monroe's game, *My Story* is most compellingly captured through the imagery Monroe depicts. Most fittingly, the cover photo featuring Jerry West ("the Logo") unsuccessfully trying to catch up to Monroe indicates that the writing, similar to Black Jesus' on-court repertoire is cool, fun, flowing and celestial.

The book is broken up into three parts, all chronicling Pearl's rise in consciousness, confidence and humanity on and off the basketball court. The anecdotes, vignettes and memories that Monroe shares throughout the tome are almost biblical as he witnesses a man being stabbed to death, has a run-in with the KKK, gets a late-night visit from a husband looking for his cheating wife, accidentally takes angel dust and endures battles on the court against, and ultimately with, the Knicks.

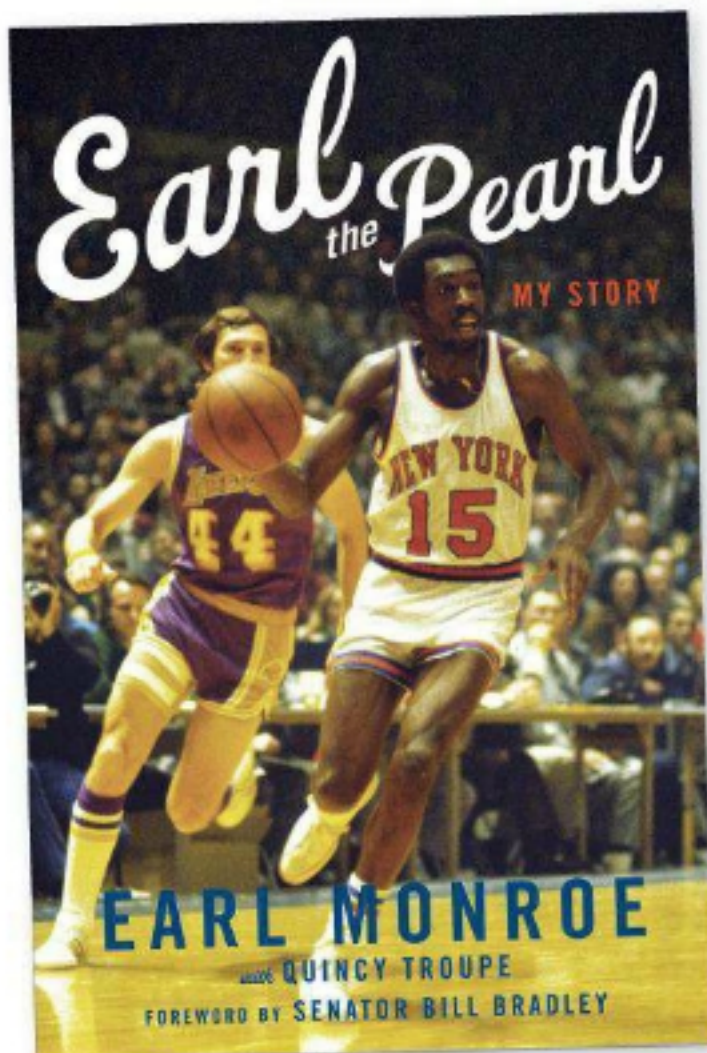
Monroe is most in command when he talks ball. One of the more memorable stories comes when Monroe was being "bodied up" by Eddie Miles, aggressively defended by maneuvers that are now illegal. He was shut out, scoring zero points for the first time in his career.

The next time Monroe faced Miles, he "kept visualizing" Oscar Robertson and "how he used to put his back up against the opponent...back the defender down...and shoot."

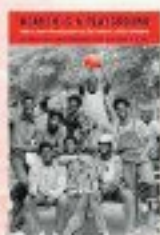
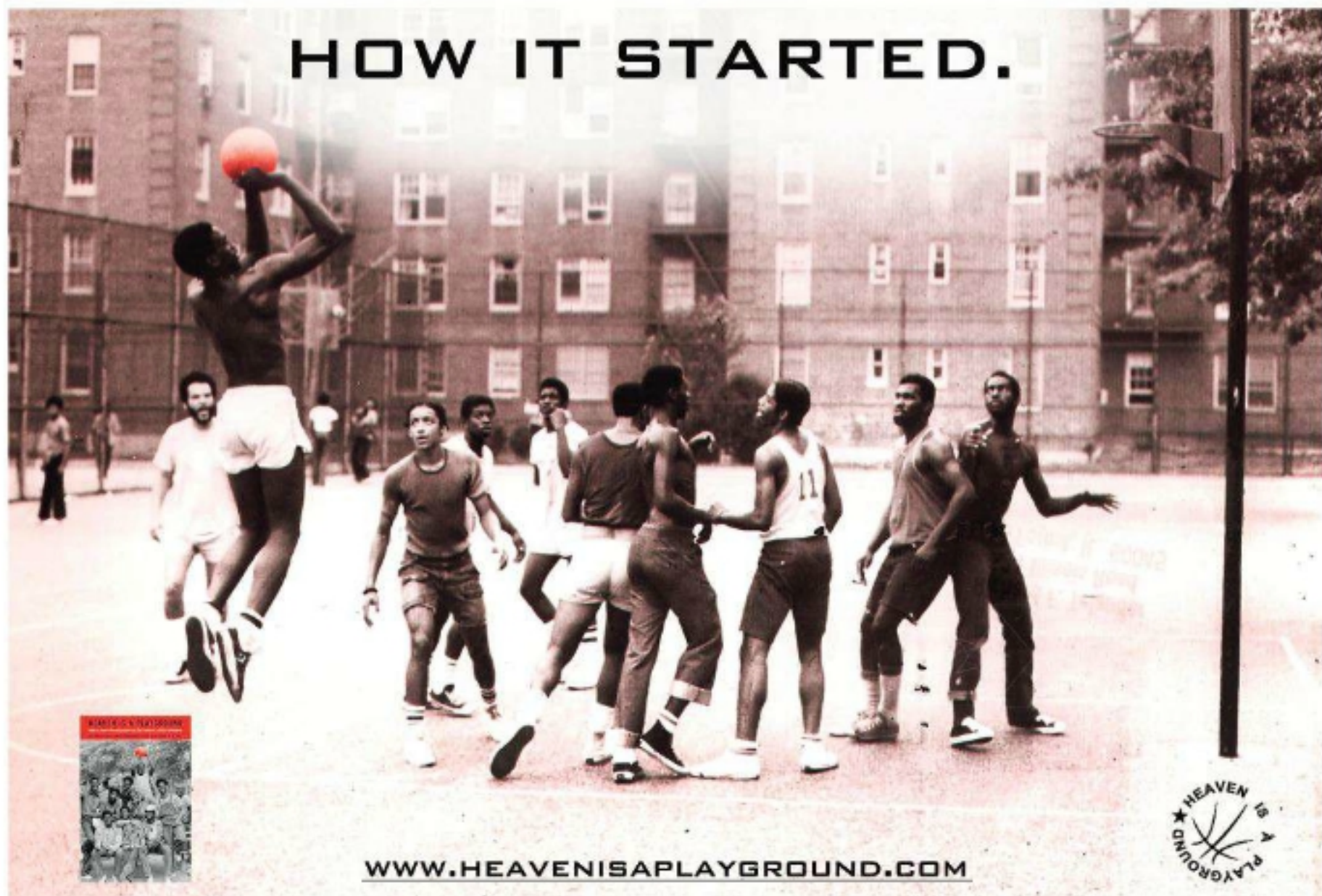
So, Monroe thought, "I'm gonna try that." He scored 32 points and told Miles after the game, "I'm only averaging 16 points against you."

This story sums up Monroe: able to swiftly recognize a problem and immediately account for it. He was named Rookie of the Year just six months later.

With his simple eloquence, Monroe's book creates a fascinating dialectic that synthesizes the poetry of his game with the realization that liberation and artistry come from hard work, hope and a prayer.—LEE GABAY



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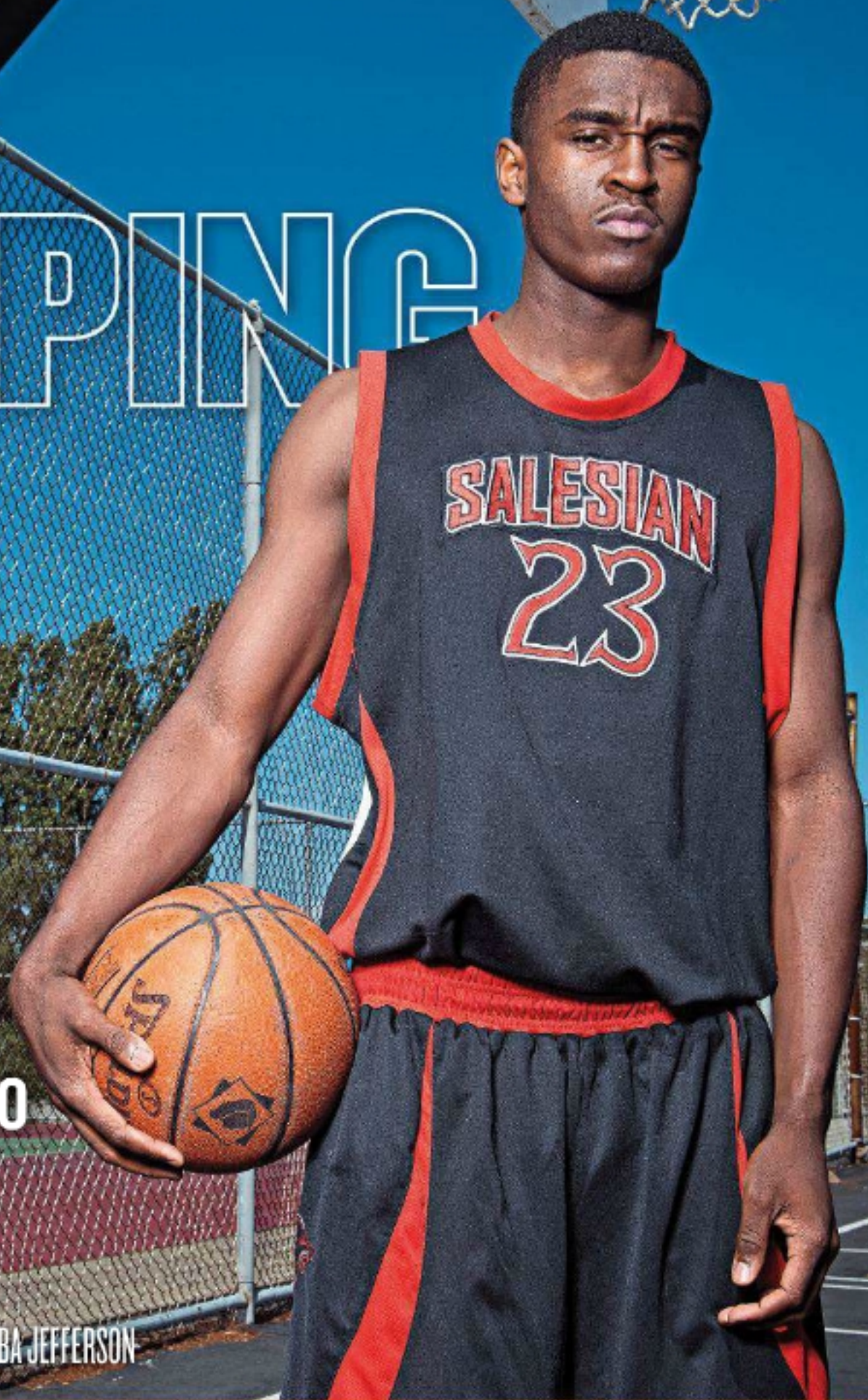


punks

# REPPING FOR THE BAY

HOMETOWN HERO  
JABARI BIRD  
HAS CAL FANS  
THINKING BIG.

Words RYAN JONES Portraits ATIBA JEFFERSON





It was mid-April when Jabari Bird put on his high school uniform one more time. This was not for a game, but a photo shoot—the results of which you see on these pages—and it occurred to him that this was probably the last time he'd put on Richmond (CA) Salesian's red and black. "Yeah, I think so," Bird says. "I definitely enjoyed my high school career. But it's time to move on."

Spoken like a young man confident in what the future holds, and Bird has every reason to be excited about the path that lies ahead. A top-20 player in the 2013 class, he led Salesian to a 100-8 record in his three varsity seasons, including a 2012 state championship. Bird wrapped up his outstanding prep career last month with a berth in the McDonald's All-American Game. The next step is a big one, although it won't take him very far at all.

The dude who proudly claims "Vallejo/Richmond" on his Twitter bio will play his college ball just a few steps down the road in Berkeley. It's hardly the first time Cal has landed a big-time basketball recruit—Jason Kidd,

"My dad went there, so I'm kind of following in his footsteps," he says of his father, Carl Bird, who was the Golden Bears' co-MVP in 1976. "I like staying close to home so my friends and family can see me, and I feel like my style of play really fits well with their system."

Local ties and family connections aside, of course, it's got to be a good fit on the court. Bird will join a talented Cal squad that won 21 games this season, earned the No. 2 seed in the Pac-12 tourney and played Syracuse tough before falling in the second round of the NCAA Tournament. All-American wing Allen Crabbe and his 18.4 ppg are gone to the NBA Draft, but most of the rest of the roster should be back and Bird looks more than capable of filling the Crabbe-sized hole in the Bears' lineup.

At 6-6 and 190 pounds, Bird is a threat from either wing spot, alternating a potent mid-range game with a knack for filling lanes on the break and, in his words, "making highlights." He says his biggest challenge is not getting complacent defensively—"at times I'm kind of lazy out there, taking possessions off," he admits—



## BASKETBALL DIARY

ANDREW HARRISON

**"I FEEL LIKE A LOT OF THE TOP PLAYERS FROM THE BAY AREA GO AWAY FOR COLLEGE, AND I JUST REALLY WANTED TO CHANGE THE TREND."**

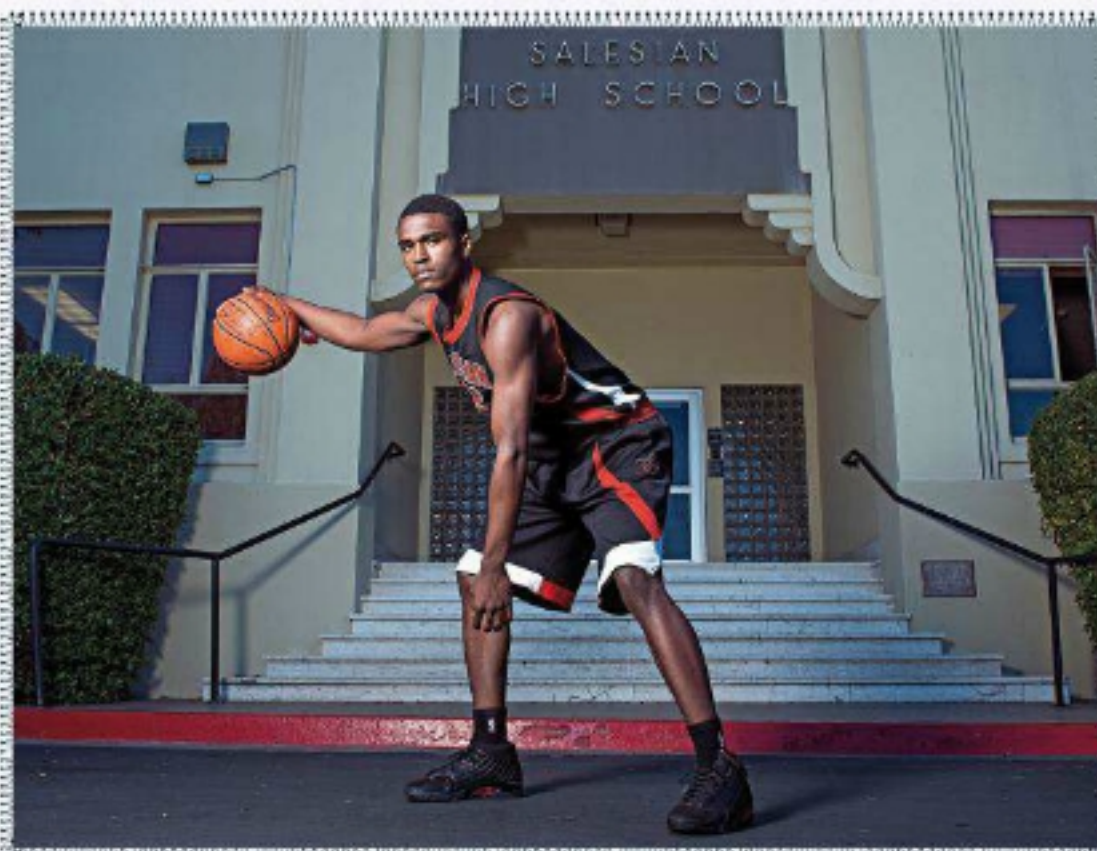
Shareef Abdur-Rahim and Leon Powe all preceded him as McDonald's selections who signed with the Golden Bears—but Bird knows it's been a long minute since one of the area's many homegrown stars stuck around for college. "I think I'm the first since Leon Powe to stay at home and rep for the Bay," he says. "I feel like a lot of the top players from the Bay Area go away for college, and I just really wanted to change the trend."

For Bird, it goes even deeper than civic pride.

but he's confident he can rid himself of that habit. "I'm always competing with myself," he says. "It's just a question of me going out and doing what I have to do."

If he does, Bird will have a chance to continue Cal's resurgence under coach Mike Montgomery. "I feel like we have the type of team next year, we can kind of go in and surprise some people," he says. "I'm looking forward to seeing what we can do."

The whole Bay will be watching.



What's up? We're back home after all the all-star games. First we were up in Chicago for the McDonald's All-American Game. That was great. We got to spend a lot of time with all the guys from around the country who we've known coming up, and we also had the chance to go to the Ronald McDonald House. Seeing those kids, it just opens your eyes. It shows you how blessed we really are just to be healthy.

After that we were up in Brooklyn for the Jordan Classic. That was different, really more like a professional experience. We met a lot of famous people, like Spike Lee and stuff. He didn't know our names, but maybe in a few years. And the Barclays Center, that was probably the nicest arena I've ever played in. I was definitely a little nervous in there at first, but once the game got started we all lost our jitters.

After that, we went to Portland for the Hoop Summit. That was a good experience, but it was probably the most disappointing trip, just the fact that we lost the game to the World Select team. It's no excuse, but they had four or five more days of practice than we did, and that was definitely an advantage for them. But they have some good players, too, like Andrew Wiggins. The McDonald's Game was the first time I'd actually seen him. He's a good player, one of the best athletes I've ever seen in high school.

And now high school basketball is over for us. I'm definitely going to miss it, especially going on AAU trips with my friends, stuff like that. But it's just on to the next phase in life. I finish school on June 6, and then we leave for Kentucky on June 28. I'm definitely looking forward to that.

Oh, and about that Jordan thing...When we were at the Jordan game, some reporter asked a bunch of us if we could beat Michael Jordan one-on-one. I didn't know when they asked if they meant in his prime or not in his prime, so I said yes. I mean, personally, I do feel like I can beat anybody. But I do realize he's the greatest player of all time. I just wanted to clarify that.



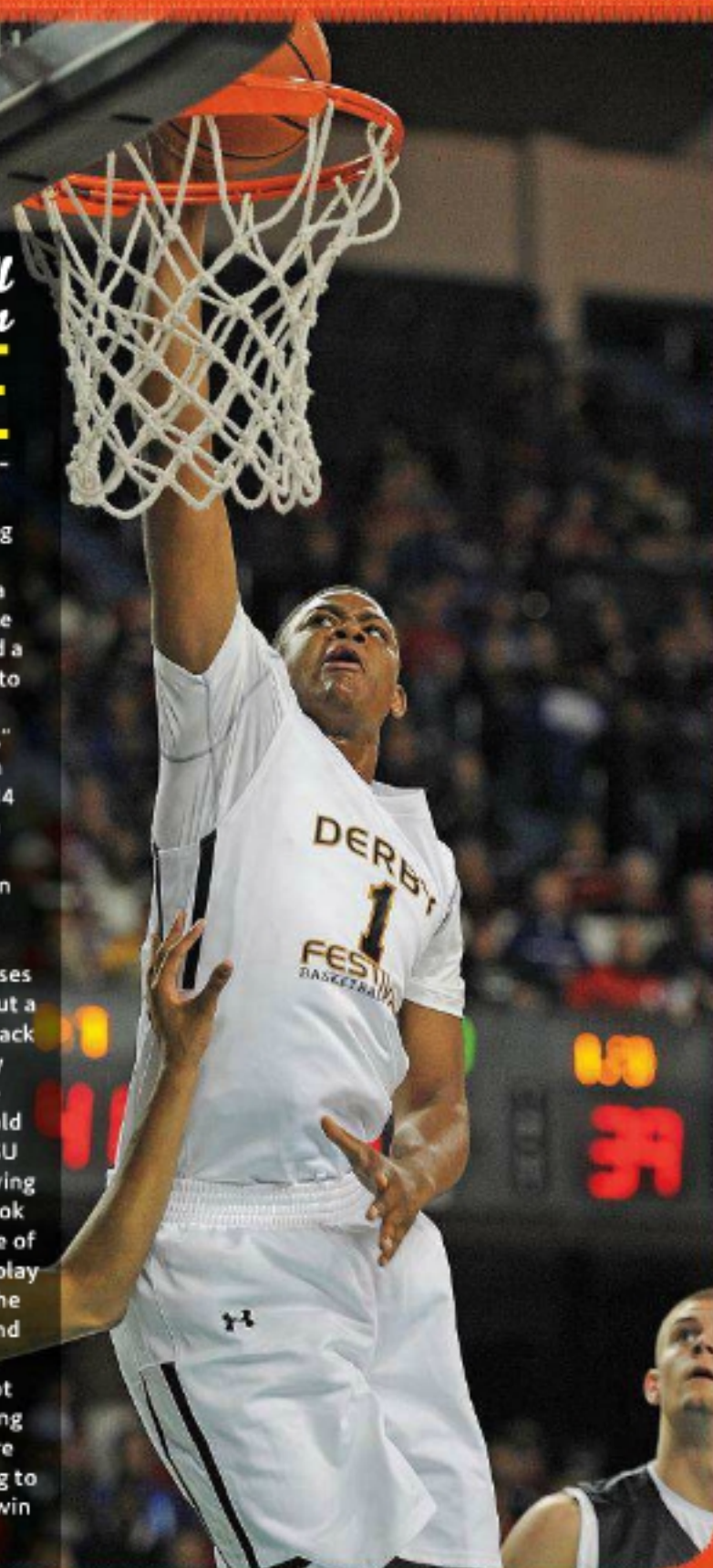
## ★ Jarrell Martin JA' RULE

At just 18, Jarrell Martin has accomplished just about everything a prep player can in Louisiana. Consider the accomplishments: a Mr. Basketball award, a state title as a student at Madison Prep and a McDonald's All-American invite to cap it all off.

"We had a pretty good season," the 6-8 forward says humbly. On the year, he dropped 26 points, 14 boards and 4 blocks a night. "I'm just trying to get better so that I can play the wing more. I've been working on my handle and jump shot."

A versatile athlete, Martin causes mismatches all over the court. Put a big man on him, he's going to attack off the bounce. Put a smaller guy on him, he's going to work in the post. Defensively, he can also hold his own at the 3 or 4 spots. At LSU though—"I felt comfortable staying home, so why would I need to look at any other schools?" the native of Baton Rouge says—he'll mostly play small forward, where he'll join the talented duo of Jordan Mickey and junior Johnny O'Bryant.

"With the guys that they've got coming in," Martin says, "I'm going to be playing the 3. But anywhere that I'm at on the court, I'm going to bring something to the table to win games." —Rodger Bohn



## ★ Becca Dahlman THE COMMODORE

The first time we called Rebekah "Becca" Dahlman, she couldn't talk because she was in the midst of a day-long session of studying for a physics test. The second, third and fourth times we called, she couldn't talk because she was working out. Once we realized she wasn't just trying to avoid us, the secret to Dahlman's success became pretty clear.

Preparation and hard work are the keys for Dahlman, the Braham (MN) High star and McDonald's All-American who finished as the first Minnesota high school girl to score 5,000 career points. "I don't really think about it now," says the 5-9 combo guard with an especially deft shooting touch, "but I'm sure as I get older I'll look back on it like, Wow, that was a lot of points." For now, she's too focused on the future: Dahlman committed to Vanderbilt, where the combination of terrific academics, consistently strong hoops and, yes, warmer weather was too attractive to pass up.

Playing college ball is nothing new in the Dahlman family: Becca is the fifth of her six siblings to hoop at the next level (her youngest brother is still in high school), and she credits older brother and former Michigan State Spartan Isaiah [SLAM 91!—Ed.] for guiding her through recruiting and driving her development. "He gave me that love for the game," she says. "In my mind, he was the best player ever."

At this point, even Isaiah might admit his little sister is the best player in the family. —Ryan Jones

# Picture Me Ballin'

UNDER-THE-RADAR PLAYERS WHO DEMAND YOUR ATTENTION.



**Ivan Rabb, Oakland (CA) Bishop O'Dowd:** Rabb solidified himself as arguably the top prospect in the 2015 class this past season while still just scratching the surface of his potential. Standing 6-9 and 210, Rabb rebounds better than anyone in the country for his age and shows multiple skills that translate to the next level. He runs the floor like a gazelle and finishes around the rim with both hands, but his nonstop motor pushes his game over the top and separates him from the rest of the pack.

**King McClure, Dallas (TX) Triple A:** Finding a player who attacks the cup with more aggression and strength than McClure has become an extremely tough task. McClure, a member of the Class of '15, uses his sturdy 6-3 frame to bowl over defenders and get to the rim, and as if that's not enough, his quick first-step and tight crossover allow him to break defenders down off the dribble. Once there, McClure alternatively finishes or hits open teammates. All of that comes with a level of toughness that every coach—Baylor, Florida and Indiana have already offered him scholarships—in the country covets.

**De'Janae Boykin, Springdale (MD) CH Flowers:** The 6-3 Boykin currently ranks as perhaps the best sophomore wing in the country. Her handles and mid-range shooting skills are coming along, and she never takes a play off. Boykin's size, strength and limitless potential make her one of the nation's most coveted college recruits, and the DMV native will be watched heavily this summer as she plays for Boo Williams on the AAU circuit. —Dave Spahn



## ★ Zak Irvin FIRE

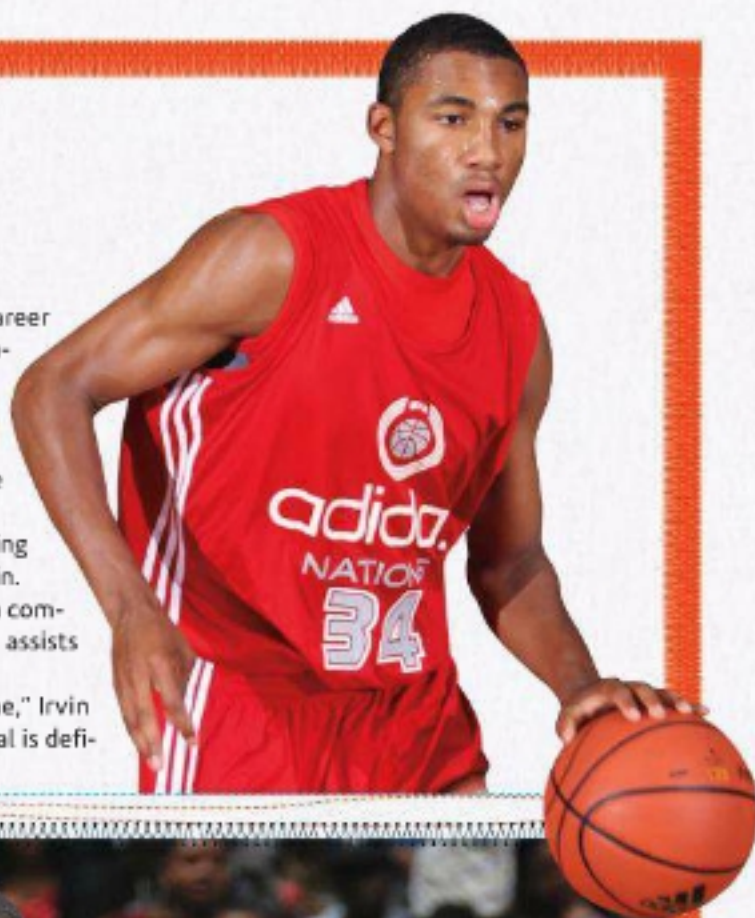
It's been a long time coming for Zak Irvin. After all, there was once a time in his high school career where he wasn't even deemed fit to play varsity basketball. As a freshman, the 6-6 Michigan-bound forward was placed on Fishers (IN) Hamilton Southeastern's JV squad after varsity coach Brian Satterfield decided the teenager needed some more development.

"All the other AAU kids were playing varsity basketball my freshman year and all of them were joking about how I played on the JV team," recalls Irvin. "It made me want to get in the gym even more and it motivated me to get ready to play on the varsity my sophomore year."

After proving he belonged, the highly touted small forward didn't take long before drawing the attention of college coaches. By his sophomore year, Michigan was already recruiting Irvin.

In his three years playing varsity, Irvin accumulated 1,239 points while leading his team to a combined 59-11 record. This past season as a senior, Irvin averaged 24.6 points, 9.0 rebounds, 3.3 assists and 2.0 steals, and was subsequently named Indiana's Mr. Basketball.

"It's a great feeling to see where I started my freshman year and just how far along I've come," Irvin says. "It was a great ride. It went by quick but I loved every second of it. Now, my biggest goal is definitely to start as a freshman and win Big Ten Freshman of the Year." —*Franklyn Calle*



## ★ Rondae Hollis-Jefferson Clippers Nation

It was just a few hours into 2013, and Rondae Hollis-Jefferson's celly wouldn't stop chirping; messages just kept pouring in at a relentless rate. "My Twitter and phone were going crazy when [friends and family] found out I was on *SportsCenter*," recalls Hollis-Jefferson, who estimates receiving around 500 messages on the day that one of his dunks aired on ESPN. "I never figured I could make it there until it happened. I couldn't text everybody back, it was just too many people."

That might've served as his national arrival, but if you've been following the prep hoops scene in the Greater Philadelphia area over the past four years you already know that the slight 6-7, 215-pound, multi-purpose forward has long been a scout—and crowd—pleaser, due to the intensity and energy he brings to both ends of the floor (not to mention the athleticism). The hard work translates to stats and wins, too: Hollis-Jefferson, whose brother Rahlir recently completed a solid four-year career at Temple University, led local powerhouse Chester High to state titles as both a sophomore and junior. And while he and his teammates fell just short of a threepeat, losing in the title game, the future Arizona Wildcat still managed to lead the Clippers to another district title as a senior, averaging 15.5 points, 11 rebounds, 4.4 assists, 2.8 steals and 2.4 blocks per game. He was named Pennsylvania's Player of the Year for the second straight season.

Looking ahead to his stay in Tucson, Hollis-Jefferson's goals remain simple. "I want to come in, compete, play hard and make us a winning team." —*Franklyn Calle*







## Déjà Vu

Former SLAM columnist and NBA journeyman Mike James explains what it was like to go from the League to the D-League and back. As told to Lang Whitaker

First, no teams brought me into training camp, so that was frustrating. I was sitting around waiting, in the gym every day with coach John Lucas. I was preparing, doing all the essentials. Finally, my agent brought up Dallas. Derek Fisher had just left the team, and they wanted to see whether or not I could still play. So I went to the NBA D-League just to showcase myself. I guess I played pretty well, because they saw the film and brought me in for a 10-day. And the rest was history.

The time I spent working out and not getting the call was frustrating, but I continued to keep my faith. I know faith and work go hand in hand, and I show you my faith by my work. I continued to believe God was going to open a door. The only thing

that I could control was that when that door opened, I could be prepared. So when I got my opportunity, I didn't look ahead to the Mavericks; I was focused on the D-League team, and I wanted to make my presence felt. I knew if I was supposed to be an NBA ballplayer, I was going to play well in the D-League. So my focus was really taking advantage of the opportunity, and then when I got the opportunity, to just run with it. People always say the cream is going to rise to the top. And the only way to make cream is to keep churning that milk, and that's the work you have to put in, that's the effort you have to put in. You may not get multiple chances—you have to take advantage of that first opportunity.

The D-League was hard. It's

hard because it's young players who are really trying to make a name for themselves, and the living conditions and lifestyle aren't the same as the NBA, so you have to adjust. Especially because I'm in my 11th year in the NBA, so playing in the D-League was a little challenging. But you have to put pride to the side and humble yourself.

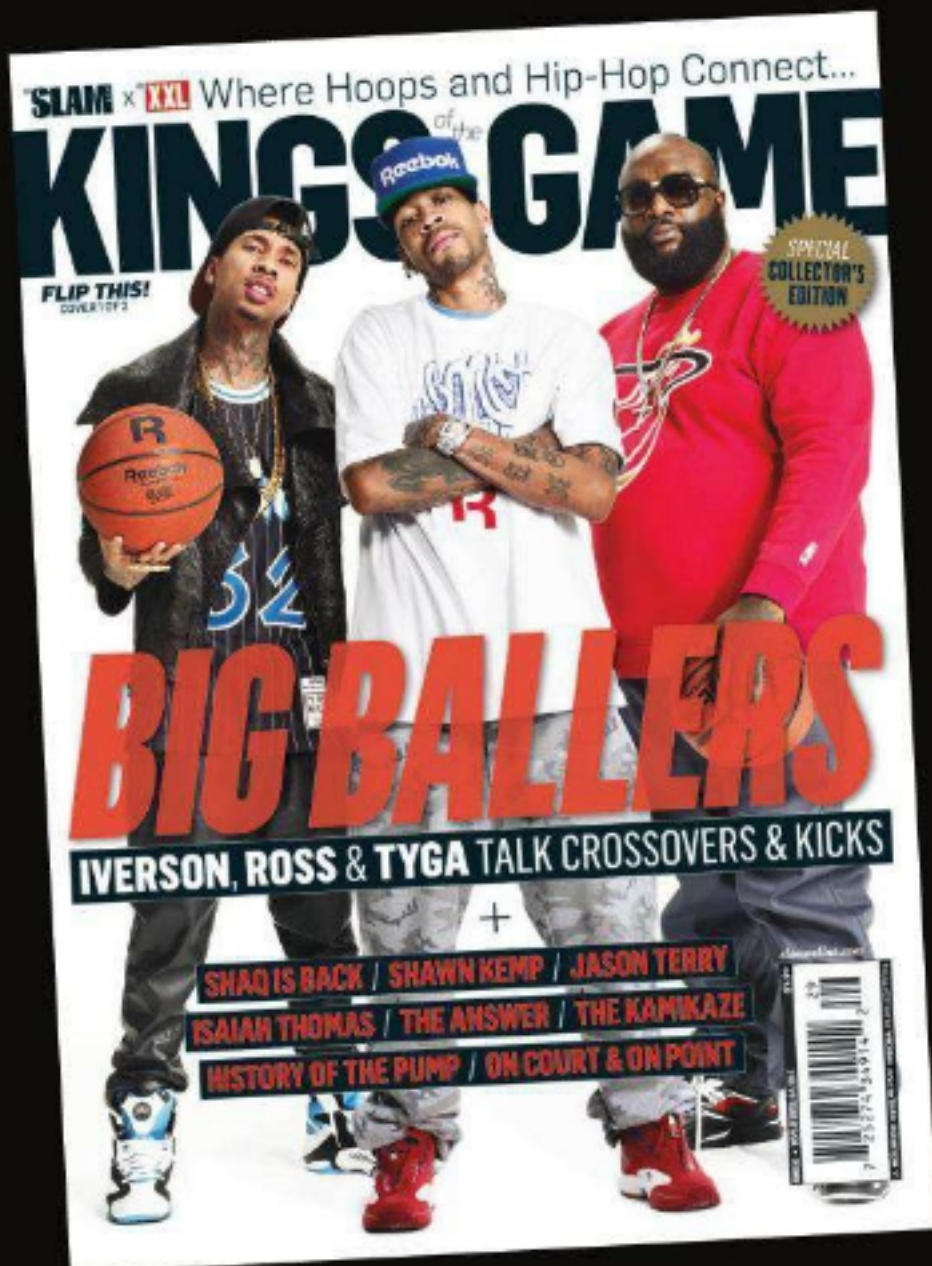
The D-League is the place you have to go to in order to keep fulfilling your goals and your destiny and your life. I'm pretty sure if I wasn't so grounded in my relationship with Christ, my pride would have been the most important thing to me, instead of it being a smaller sacrifice for greater results. That's what I had to look at, understanding if I still wanted to be in the League, I had to show that not

only can I still play, but that my skill level is higher than the D-League level. It was a blessing, and I took advantage of it.

Who knows what's next? I have a passion for the game, I have a passion for teaching the game, so that's one thing I think about a lot. Do I want to work in a front office, or do I want to work on the court? Because right now there's no development. These young players will cross you up, make you fall, then miss the layup. Then they'll think about how they crossed you up instead of focusing on the finish. So just getting some discipline and understanding back into the game of basketball, I'd love to be a catalyst for that. I only want to play the game two more years, then I'm done. And after that we'll see what happens.

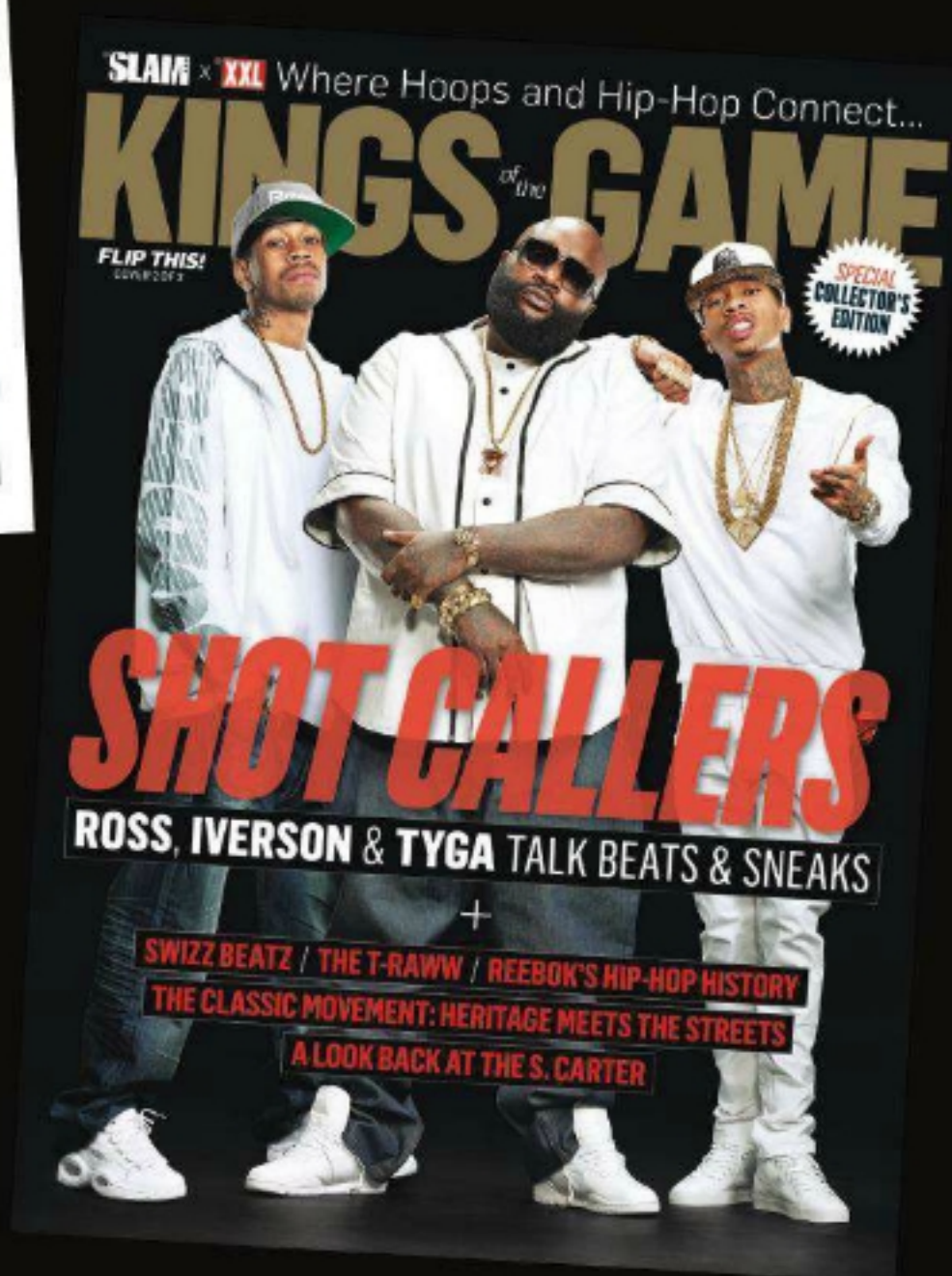
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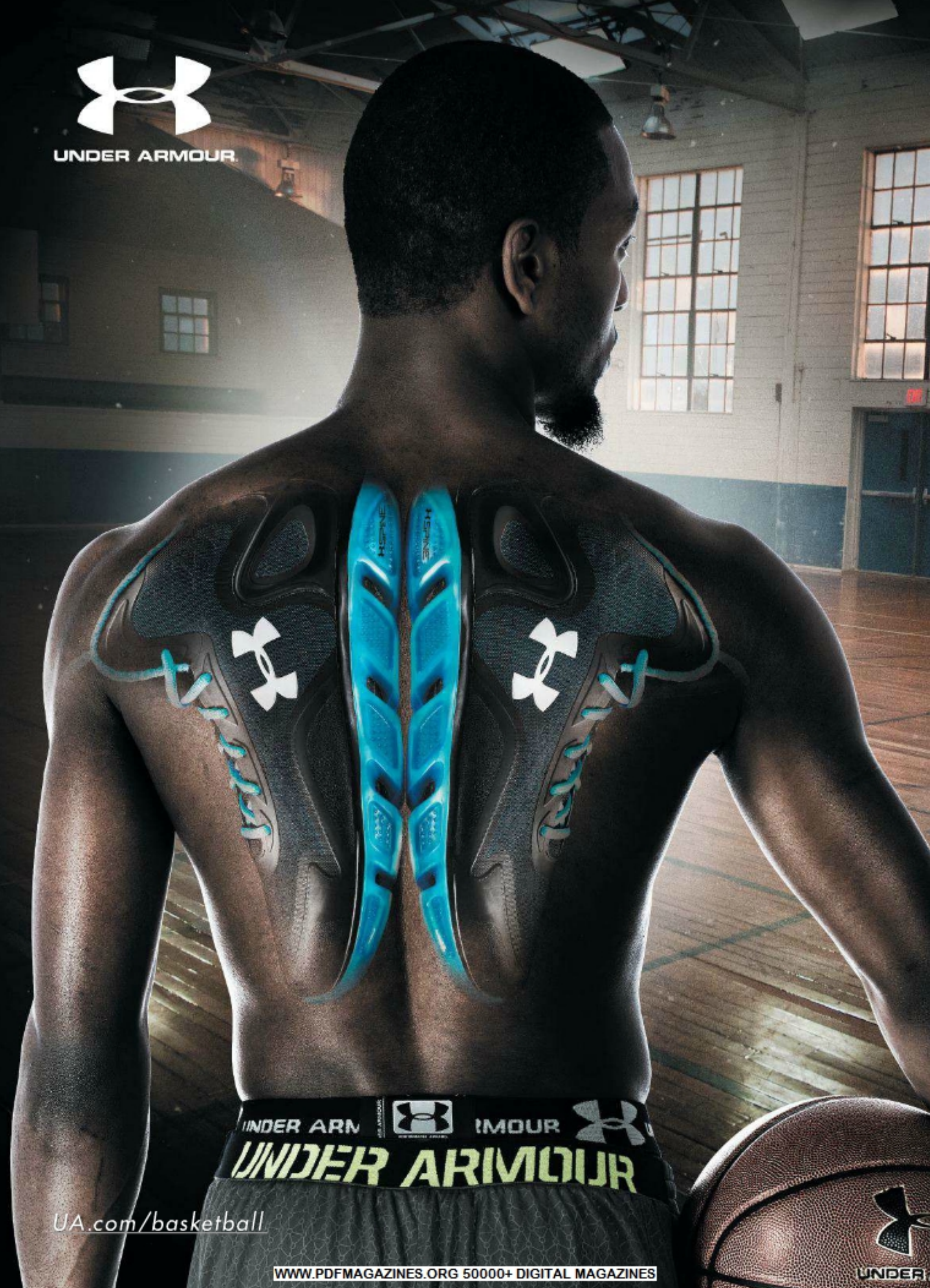
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